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S. FRANCIS AND THE GREYFRIARS

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S. FRANCIS AND THE GREYFRIARS

BY THE
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Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Hereford

WITH
PREFACE
BY
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PREFACE

EVERY man—or, to be moderate, every other man —at some time or other desires to clear his thoughts about Saint Francis. For the sake of an ancient friendship, begun in Clerkenwell in the sunshine of Edward Eyre's influence, Dr. Day gives me an opportunity not only of arranging but even of expressing some of mine within the covers of his admirable book.

Of that book, after careful reading, greatly enjoyed, I have decided to say nothing. It will speak for itself. But in my nothing must be just this one word. The literature of S. Francis is so immense and often so difficult to follow that we all owe a great debt to Dr. Day for having studied it so reverently and digested it for us so skilfully.

And because even my small collection of notes is too thick for a Preface, I will use my turn to point, not at any of the tender, consolatory, and engaging reflections left by this life of sunlight, but at a certain bracing reaction produced in a lazy and timid mind by reading the foundation pages of the record, and especially the Saint's letters, and the *Mirror of Perfection*.

To read these is to become less contented with selfishness, less fastidious, more hopeful of attaining, through discipline, some function in the real world, the world of spirit and character ; less inclined to

believe that to be rid of ambition and care is enough ; or that the road of quiet is the narrow way. ' Our weakness pitying see ' is a line in our minds when we remember Francis.

For he is one of the stalwarts of the Gospel ; he is of those who in the grace of Christ ' waxed valiant in fight and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.' In him the Word was mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. He ' held the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end.' He stood before kings, as you see him in the Bardi Chapel ; and the fire confessed his power. In him we see that to be spiritually minded is life and peace, both energy and repose, movement in harmonious balance ; not release from sin only, but also adventure and sacrifice.

Yes, it may be that the qualities in Francis we must expressly recall, as most easily hidden by entrancing fancy, are the qualities of greatness, strength, and prudence, the prudence that is the resolute ordering of a passing life towards an enduring end.

The hero of Christ that he was is obscured—though in luminous cloud—by the image of a character romantic, humorous, pathetic. Of the documents, many have heard only of the *Fioretti*, and think we know the *Fioretti* because we remember a story about a pig's foot and Brother Juniper, a story which does not even belong to the book, but is an echo of some family and holiday joke of early friars. All that simplicitarianism is a fragrant relic of what once was simplicity ; but for our light and wandering minds it is not the right medicine for an ignorance of S. Francis. He is a flower and a melody ; but the flower is of a strong sap and bears a solid fruit, and the melody is

no 'lean and flashy song.' Dr. Day will have set Francis, I know, to a music sweet and grave and powerful, stately and energetic, the music of the Church. Of the Saint's joy we shall hear much in the book, and we do not forget it easily. But the resolution that marched to the tune of that joy we have to recall. *Mortem suscepit cantando* says Thomas of Celano of his end ; and the words describe his whole life in grace. He welcomed with a song the life-long death of service and sacrifice ; and, whatever graces of poetry and glee he threw round it, its sustaining and inner melody was *Voce mea ad dominum clamavi*, a song of the vowed servant of God in marching battle of affliction. It was this Psalm (cxlii) he sang as he lay blind and naked at the Portiuncula for the advent of his sister Death, with an unfaltering love and a resolve, spite of all kinds of opposition, unaltered.

> And seven swords were in his heart,
> But one was in his hand.[1]

He was a troubadour, you say ? Yes, but in the fashion of that singer who flung and caught his sword in the air before the conquering host and in the face of the enemy. He was a man in love with simplicity, but not a simple-lifer. He loved hardness because in hardness it was possible to come into contact and conflict with wrong. Was he a fanatic ? Not if fanaticism is the taste for eccentric and self-tormenting exploits without purpose or effect. He began his new life by rebuilding a church, and Innocent III saw him in a dream holding up the Lateran Basilica. The age was familiar with the helplessness for real reform of wild devotees, the dancing dervishes of an Asiatic and

[1] G. K. Chesterton : *Ballad of the White Horse.*

un-Christian invasion of the Church. Dr. Day will tell us, I am sure, all we need to know of the Cathari and the Albigenses. Francis was precisely *not* a Manichean. Popes, used to the zeal and self-stripping of heretics, pointed out his orthodoxy, his positive faith, his devotion to the Church-Body, his constructive ethic.

In him a wonderful and unflinching asceticism was positive, not privative, not dualistic. He did not despise the creatures or their materiality ; but discerned and preferred *this* creature and this material that was poverty, a sister and a queen, rich in promise, the appointed minister and angel of God for the needs of the age, the Beatrice, the Virgil, the guide this poet waited for, and could not but follow. He is no denier or doubter, letting an over-refined criticism of the world and society rob him of movement. 'He chose a path and went down it like a thunderbolt.'[1]

He is gallant and quick. He is like schoolboys who 'laugh at kicks and train to rejoice in whip-cord muscles';[2] and, like a leader-boy, he can be brisk in rebuke of his companions, but never stiff with them, or remote. He was, said Thomas of Celano, 'fearless without being arrogant' ; and that is a great achievement ; it is easier to be arrogant without being fearless. I suppose frankness and simplicity are the natural marks of this supernatural character. The poverty he desired for himself and his people was simple and real. It was not at first intended to be a religious poverty in the sense of the age—that is to say a privileged begging. It was to be the natural and

[1] G. K. Chesterton on Joan of Arc in *Orthodoxy*.
[2] Meredith in *Lord Ormont*.

energetic poverty of the labouring class. His brethren were ' minores '—of the *menu peuple*, of the masses.

But the simplicity, gentleness, charm, poetry of Francis are remembered by every one. What is sometimes forgotten is the strength that was so simple, the power within the charm. You may believe what you please on a variety of subjects, but never consent to believe that effects are without causes, or that a man can master an event without being, in some respect or other, masterful ; and whatever may happen in the world of ultimate values, in ' this world ' as we call it, when something happens some one has been energetic.

Francis was the charmer who is ready to abandon every charm to win the sword of service.

Do we always remember, for example, that he was a very great and powerfully eloquent *preacher*, not to birds only but to the stubborn hearts of men ?

In our time, when we long for a fresh impulse in the presentation and practice of our faith and see few signs of its approach, we appreciate as the principal evidence of the greatness of Francis his originality, his achievement of detachment, his seizure of a new fulcrum for work in the Gospel. It is not merely difficult to make a fresh start, it is *unspeakably* difficult. It seems impossible even to *imagine* a new departure. Francis, while devoted to the Church as he knew it, and distrusting all eccentricity of doctrine or discipline, yet found a path of new advance. It is truer to say that he, like our smallness, could not *imagine* the new way, but was visited and possessed by God so as to open and follow it. Detachment, originality, how rare these are. Perhaps the net of prescription is closest, least escapable, in our own land and Church. The Saint lived in

an atmosphere more aristocratic and freer than ours ; a society where quality counted for more ; where the classes and the minds most inevitably conservative were less powerful. He was not born with the conviction that a man of ordinary station could not escape from the *queue*. And the monarchism of Rome itself favoured flexibility. At one time, in our own world, fashion and favour could mitigate the severity of our rigid and regimented democracy. A genius, recognized by one of the stars, might be lifted over the heads of deans and dukes to the plane of effective action. But now Fashion is grown faint, and her little sister Favour is dead. Farewell Rewards and Fairies, and who of late takes nobodies to see the Pope of Rome ?

Perhaps the obstacles before new service could be more easily ' seen over ' then than they are now. But, when all is said, consider and venerate the great detachment and adventure of the Saint. He breaks from society and wealth ; he launches into the deep from the Benedictine shelter, just as Dominic launched from the Cistercian protection and companionship. The Lateran Council has forbidden fresh Rules, fresh communities. But the Franciscan Rule is approved and bulled. And from Dominic and Francis together springs an immense impulse of devotion ; above all an immense success in declaring the divine Saviour, in preaching the tidings ' to every creature,' to the whole frame and order of life. It belonged, perhaps, to Dominic to organize and to Francis to inspire. But Dominic would not be Dominic without Francis. You say that Francis met a kind of Moscow at the hands of Elias. But which of the two men survives ? Which mind is it that rules ? Those miseries were the pene-

tration, into the most sensitive region of the Saint's being, of that law and power of the Cross by which, in uttermost death, the Resurrection power is liberated in the surrendered life of Francis.

Then, with adventure most adventurous, there was an unshakable consistency. Francis is both impetuous and persevering. Nothing is more amazing in this hero saint than the consistency of a course undertaken in enthusiasm. It is the consistency not of a hard-bitten resolution, but of an ever-fresh and ever-growing ardour. It is the consistency of a lover who does not cease to love. His devotion thrives on that it suffers. He is of those who have been graced to obey the divine command 'Abide in My love.' As the divine Saviour is loved of His Father and loves in response, so these, His true disciples—He loving them with divine fullness—learn His own love ; they are pupils in His school of love. They become lovers like their Master ; whole-hearted in response, not to be wearied by the costliest obedience. They are made perfect through suffering.

In this passion of love in Francis we find the source at once of delight and of sternness, of gay simplicity and of sacrifice. His very courtesy is the courtesy of a prince in war ; and as his joy shone more and more towards the perfect day, so did his mortification deepen towards the accomplished death ; so that, while the birds sang about his bed in glee, he was lifted from it and laid naked upon the ground, that he might deliver his last breath in the arms of Poverty, his queen and sister.

In his poverty had he ever rested since the beginning of his conversion ? He makes one feel that the desire of repose, vacation, interval, is perhaps altogether mis-

taken, and that we are less exhausted by work than by the notion that we ought to attain an unattainable holiday. Francis, like the heart in the body, never paused from the first moment of the new life till the close of his pilgrimage.

His story is a call to action on the side of Christ—may we dare to say? We see the apprehension and enabling of a man to renew the unchanging impulse of the Church, to receive power and become witness. From the side of the servant, it is a response both swift and unrepenting to the divine call; and the perseverance, let it be repeated, is the perseverance, not primarily of a natural obstinacy, but of an affection that cannot be tamed and will not be denied, an overwhelming, a sovereign passion for God.

Some say that Francis was no mystic; and this is true if 'mystic' means a man who does not look up and out but is satisfied by a light within himself. Say rather that Francis has redeemed the name of mystic by the life of a lover altogether forgetful of himself, who sees even the world haunted by God's beauty and the scene of His coming victory; who sees, as in the pictures, the burdened Cross flying on pinions in the air and in the light; who in richest endowment is always recipient, and in the most solitary exaltation is never alone, never self-sustained, always upheld, always beloved and in love.

Perhaps in the spiritual journey of the Church we cannot often revert to any particular movement, though there are times for digging again the wells our fathers digged, for the recovery of the ancient ever-living water. Whether or no we can be Franciscans, we may invoke the names of S. John, S. Paul, S. Francis, and

implore a fresh invasion from above of light and life ; and implore also the grace not to be found wanting in our several corners, in response to the Spirit we all wait for. Meanwhile we pore over the story of the Saint not, as Father Benson said, to make out of it the stuff for dreams, but to find in it courage for the common tasks of common days, the correction of self-pity and sloth and prayerlessness.

For the purpose of moral correction read the documents again, and especially the *Mirror of Perfection*, *Speculum Perfectionis*, secured for us in its present form by Sabatier ; but expect no deliverance to come from an example however strenuous, for example only makes the heart of weaklings faint.

We will make a homely resolution, but not all homely neither. There is the other ' kindred point ' as well ; there is heaven. It is only a Lord in heaven Who, as He creates the example, makes it an avenue for life. Only the vision and the rapture can enable the least of us for the trudging and the drudgery. And in our time also, the majesty is not withdrawn ; the glory and the kingdom are forgotten, not remote.

Men murmur at Thy voice, but Thy decree,
Supreme in power each stubborn heart to quell,
Builds here on earth the saintly citadel
To shine with Thine own self for ever free.
Come ! quickly come ! through Thee, heaven's mystic door,
For death's dark exile gain we God's true light,
For space-bound sense, existence infinite.[1]

P. N. WAGGETT.

[1] Richard Meux Benson.

NOTE

These chapters were read as lectures in the cathedral church of Hereford during the Lent of 1926, in preparation for the seventh centenary of the death of S. Francis. The short bibliography which will be found at the end of the book includes the works which have been most often consulted in its writing; it has seemed unnecessary to burden the pages with many references.

The colour of the binding is that chosen by the British Society of Franciscan Studies for the covers of its publications. It suggests the colour of the early Franciscan habit of undyed wool, from which the name Greyfriar was derived.

E. H. D.

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S. FRANCIS AND THE GREYFRIARS

I

FORERUNNERS OF S. FRANCIS

'IN the beginning of the thirteenth century,' says Matthew Arnold, in his Essay on Religious Sentiment, 'when the clouds and storm had come, when the gay sensuous pagan life was gone, when men were not living by the senses and understanding, when they were looking for the speedy coming of antichrist, there appeared in Italy, to the north of Rome, in the beautiful Umbrian country at the foot of the Apennines, a figure of the most magical power and charm, S. Francis. His century is, I think, the most interesting in the history of Christianity after its primitive age, more interesting than even the century of the Reformation; and one of the chief figures, perhaps the very chief, to which this interest attaches itself, is S. Francis. And why? Because of the profound popular instinct which enabled him, more than any man since the primitive age, to fit religion for popular use. He brought religion to the people. He founded the most popular body of ministers of religion that has ever existed in the Church. He transformed monachism by uprooting the stationary monk, and sending him, as a mendicant

friar, to be a stranger and a sojourner, not in the wilderness, but in the most crowded haunts of men, to console them and do them good. This popular instinct of his is at the bottom of his famous marriage with poverty. Poverty and suffering are the condition of the people, the multitude, the immense majority of mankind; and it was towards this people that his soul yearned. "He listens," it was said of him, "to those to whom God Himself will not listen."'

We need not endorse every word of Matthew Arnold's estimate, but we see in it an instance of the power of S. Francis over one whose view of Christianity itself was detached and critical.

That power has, indeed, been exercised over men of every belief and of no belief. John Ruskin finds his simple, strenuous life reproved by the cloak of S. Francis that hangs yet in the convent at Assisi. In one of his most fruitful works Bishop Westcott has shown how in an age of violent unrest, of terrible corruption, 'the Spirit of Christ was not left without witness. Preachers arose on many sides who vindicated for the kingdom of God the claim to righteousness and peace and joy. For the most part their work was transitory because it was destructive, but one among them, Francis of Assisi, spoke of life, so that his work can never cease to move. He built up, purified, ennobled what he found, overcoming evil by the good. Through Francis of Assisi the mediaeval efforts after the kingdom of God found their most characteristic embodiment. . . . He placed himself on the level of the most abject, and found peace and joy in the completeness of devotion.' [1]

[1] Westcott: *Social Aspects of Christianity*.

Francis is a saint whose simple following of Christ elicits the admiration of every sincere Christian, and those who see in him an exemplar of life forget for the time all ecclesiastical and confessional differences. Though a most loyal son of the Roman Church, he is the possession of the whole Church. Students of early Franciscanism are found in every religious body. Foremost among them is M. Paul Sabatier, the Alsatian Protestant pastor. And students are many, for the Franciscan sources are exceptionally good. No life of any saint is so fully documented, by those who were his first companions, or were familiar with the details of his life.

The student of history can regard no man as isolated, however great his personality, however transcendent his achievement. Fully to understand him we must know what traditions he inherited, what had shaped his thought, what forces played upon him, to what environment he responded. We have first, then, to consider what idea S. Francis inherited of the life of complete dedication to God and renunciation of the world, that life which had been lived in the Church from the earliest centuries, in varying forms, before he came to give it yet another form. For his Primitive Rule asserted in its opening clauses a continuity with the dedicated life as the Church had always exhibited it, founded in three counsels : 'The Rule and life of the Brothers is this; namely, to live in obedience, in chastity, and without property.'

Withdrawal from the world to live towards God is not peculiar to Christianity. Every religion which teaches the possibility of the union of the soul with God has at least the potentiality of producing modes of

life externally resembling those of the Christian hermit or monk or friar. For in every such religion there will be sincere and zealous souls who find their progress towards a real apprehension of God and union with Him impeded by the insistent claims of the world, and who will withdraw wholly or partly from it; binding themselves to a greater strictness of personal life than that which is possible in normal human relations, seeking through the discipline of the body the liberation of the soul. They will not be found to censure those who remain in the world, or to contend that the way of life which they have chosen is the only way for all, but they will feel that they have received the call to follow God in a special mode of life.

To the Christian of the first age the world—considered as human life organized without reference to the paramount claim of God upon it—appeared not merely as a hindrance to that union with God which is the ultimate perfection of man, but as a force actively, incessantly hostile to it. The First Epistle of S. John, with its warning that the whole world lieth in the domain of the evil one, seemed to them to indicate entire separation from it. As of old, God had visited men to take out a people for His Name. To live in a world which knew not God was continually to risk a disloyal compliance with its standards, a damning compromise with it. The ideal of the Christian differed absolutely from the ideal of the world as he saw it; and in despair of reforming the world he would withdraw from it, or submit to be thrust out, and with others like-minded form a new society, not within the larger society but apart from it. Conceiving of the Christian life as ascetic, experiencing

the difficulty of living the ascetic life in a world given almost wholly to self-pleasing, men and women framed Christian communities, or even lived the solitary life, in contempt of the world and in seclusion from it, their resolution strengthened by the expectation of the nearness of the second coming of Christ to judge the world. We may distinguish different motives in this withdrawal from the world. Some fled because they aspired to become spiritual athletes, and were strong; others because they felt themselves too weak to contend against evil in the world. Of the latter was Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem in the second century, the first of Christian hermits. He went into the wilderness because he could no longer sustain the contest against evil men and slanderous tongues; he sought in a backwater, apart from the main stream of life, peace and space for personal communion with his Lord.

It was in Egypt that Christian monasticism took its rise, when men began to turn in numbers from the City of Destruction to realize in the desert and in the cell the City of God. The ascetic spirit had greatly influenced Christianity in Egypt, and the moral atmosphere of pagan life was of a kind to provoke against it the strongest kind of reaction. In the flight of Christians to a life apart there seems to have been no conscious imitation of such examples as Holy Scripture presents in the persons of Elijah, S. John Baptist, and S. Paul; whose retirements, moreover, were temporary retreats rather than the adoption of a mode of life. Monasticism had its origin in the withdrawal of individual Christians to cells near to cities and villages. It took its first notable development when S. Anthony the Hermit, towards the close of the third century,

established the custom of the solitary life in the desert. Himself venerated for his cheerfulness, serenity, and wisdom, his life became the exemplar of countless others who, following different types of religious discipline, first planted in the congenial climate of Egypt the germs of almost every later form which monasticism assumed in the Churches of East and West.

The monasticism of Egypt began, then, in the response of the individual to the impulse of retirement to the solitary life with God, in flight from the world. There are few who can sustain that mode of life without peril. It had in Egypt its physical dangers; it has everywhere its spiritual dangers. Long-continued solitude, for however high a purpose it be espoused, is unnatural to man; the desire for companionship and for guidance, no less than for some measure of protection, soon drew the solitaries of the Egyptian desert into association. They began to build their cells in groups, they established some slight ties with their neighbours, they accepted direction from the one of their group who for his experience and wisdom was accounted worthy of confidence. In the common interest a discipline for individual faults was instituted and accepted. But the members of these idiorhythmic groups remained essentially hermits. No rule of life was imposed; there was no formal profession of vows; each pursued the routine which he found most consonant with the fulfilment of his vocation, and with spiritual advance. Manual work was recognized as an imperative necessity, not merely for subsistence, but as a protection against 'accidie,' that weariness of soul which is the besetting temptation of all religious when once the stage of early enthusiasm is passed.

An inestimable gain from this association of hermits in groups was the periodical meeting for worship in common which it made possible, and the freedom of access to the sacraments, of which some of the forerunners in the eremitic life had been deprived for long periods.

From this grouping of hermits' cells, and from the occasional worship in common and the adoption of simple rules, it was but a short step to the community; the coenobitic life was a natural development from the idiorhythmic. Of this community life Pachomius was the founder, early in the fourth century, succeeding where others had failed. The common life quickly became definitely ordered, monasticism in a highly organized form sprang up virtually complete. The novitiate or period of probation was imposed upon those who offered themselves for the life, a safeguard to the individual no less than to the community. Officials were appointed to supervise the various activities of the monks. The monasteries grew to a great size; within their enclosing walls were the church, the refectory for the meals taken in common, the infirmary for the sick and aged, the shops in which monks worked at the trades which supplied their simple needs, the garden in which their food was grown. Each monastery aimed at becoming a self-supporting society, an independent economic unit which needed no relation with the outside world, like a mediaeval Cistercian monastery. The archimandrite, corresponding with the abbot of later days in the West, ruled all. Prayer, manual work, and study filled their days.

The forms of religious life which took their rise in Egypt, and came to their full development there long before the end of the fourth century, have persisted

all through the centuries since, and are found in Christendom, Eastern and Western, to-day. The solitary with whom monasticism began is rarely found to-day, he has become exceptional since those Middle Ages which have left to us in England so many traces of hermitages and anchorites' cells. Yet one is known, by name at least, all the world over, who died but ten years ago: Charles de Foucauld, that French officer and intrepid explorer who became the Hermit of the Sahara, and whose life, written by one of the great masters of French prose, has revealed the beautiful secrets of a hidden life for the admiration of the whole world. Hermits living in groups are found in Spain; and among the Eastern Orthodox the idiorhythmic life is followed on Mount Athos. The Carthusian Order also, with its reduction of the common life, and the seclusion of the monk within his cell for the greater part of each week, may be considered essentially idiorhythmic rather than coenobitic. The coenobitic life is represented pre-eminently by the Benedictines, and the various reforms which have sprung from the original Benedictine stock.

The forms of the religious life admit to-day of another classification, into the contemplative, the active, and the mixed. The contemplative is enclosed, shut off from the world to the common life of prayer and work within the monastery, engaging in no works of external charity. The active communities have as a principal aim the service of the Church in the world; missionary, educational, and charitable works occupy a great part of their energies. Other communities are mixed, giving much time to prayer, but having also some external activities.

Egyptian monasticism was essentially contemplative. It was a flight from a world which it seemed impossible to leaven, in order to fulfil the aspiration after individual perfection, to satisfy the hunger after personal righteousness, felt by those who would be imitators of Christ. The methods by which the Egyptian monks and hermits sought to attain their end are not easy for the mind of the twentieth century to judge with sympathetic understanding. We can hope to do so only if we remember that these ascetics of Nitria and the Scete were men as real as ourselves, striving with a passionate sincerity to accomplish a task to which we set ourselves but half-heartedly. At least we can measure their sincerity by observing what it exacted of them.

The monasticism of the Egyptian desert was indeed a warfare, a discipline of athletes. It had, as every movement of a large number of men must have, its less admirable, even its darker, aspects. At times, and in some regions, it did not avoid exaggeration, especially in the austerities in which there was a rivalry between hermit and hermit. Fanaticism waits ever at the elbow of the ascetic. Yet on the whole the monasticism of the desert was morally and spiritually sound; at its highest it produced saints.

Sound in itself, we have said. But it is natural and legitimate to ask whether it was not a movement essentially individualistic and selfish; a seeking of personal safety regardless of the whole Body of Christ in the world; regardless too of the pagan world, left to its fate and its wickedness without the aid which sustained missionary zeal might have brought to it. The question does not admit of the easy, unconditioned answer which the practical modern mind might give

to it. If we are inclined to contend that such flight from strife with the evil in the world was selfish, we have to remember what abundant seed was planted in that desert, ripening to fruit of which the whole world ultimately partook.

For in the solitude of the desert Christian thought and Christian devotion were free to develop. The monks were not as a body learned, though neither were they ignorant, but scholarship had its refuge in the cells of Nitria and the Scete. Athanasius, a protagonist in the warfare against heresy, found nothing censurable in the principle of the monasticism of the desert; it was among the monks that he found the intellectual support of orthodoxy, and with them that he took refuge in a time of persecution. We must not call them selfish because external charities were not a principal occupation of their life; the work which they accomplished for the Church and religion was of a different kind. In the first stage, as in many subsequent ages, monasteries showed themselves centres of Christian thought and piety, in which forces were for a time concentrated which might have been far less effective if more widely diffused, and which were afterwards liberated for the advantage of more peaceful days. 'We know,' Dr. Hannay says, 'that many men, clergy and laity alike, visited the hermits, sought, and we cannot doubt it, received from them fresh spiritual strength, rekindled in the desert cells lamps that had gone out for want of oil.'[1] That is a function which the religious life of communities continually discharges. In our own day the need of contemplative monasticism has been urged by no less a historian and

[1] Hannay: *The Wisdom of the Desert.*

philosopher than Dr. Charles Bigg, late Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford. 'If,' he says, 'society is to be permeated by religion, there must be reservoirs of religion. . . . We need a special class of students of God—of men and women whose absorbing interest it is to work out the spiritual life in all its purity and integrity.'[1] To be good is ultimately to be useful. The words of those hermits and monks speak to us still across the centuries, kindling afresh the flames of Christian wisdom and love. We shall find reflected in S. Francis the essential spirit of those early days, the love of God, and of man, and of all things created.

It may seem that the monasticism of the desert, the foundation of all religious life in community, has been discussed at disproportionate length. But it was there that great spiritual problems were first worked out to their solution. It was there that the foundations were laid and tested of that great edifice which has in many ages and regions been the very bulwark of the Church in her active work in the world. We must never forget that over the whole of Central and Western Europe the history of the Church has been made by monks, and that the development of civilization and learning has been profoundly affected by them.

'The Benedictine Rule, the parent of all the great rules down to the time of the Mendicant Orders, was nothing but a systematic adaptation of the teaching and experience of the Egyptian hermits to the needs of Western life.'[2] Great as the achievement of S. Benedict was, his gift was that of formulation rather than of

[1] Bigg: *Wayside Sketches in Ecclesiastical History.*
[2] Hannay: *The Wisdom of the Desert.*

initiation. His work was indispensable, if the monastic spirit was to breathe afresh through those countries which had known the Roman rule, with its genius for ordered liberty. From the very first Western monasticism showed a tendency towards organization and legislation. Cassian had brought to the south of Gaul at the beginning of the fifth century his knowledge of Egyptian monasticism. Towards the end of the same century S. Benedict based upon Cassian, and the writings of those whom Cassian acknowledged as his guides, the famous Benedictine Rule which became the norm of all Western monasticism except the Celtic, which lay outside the main stream, and was not destined to endure.

Though the Benedictine Rule derived from the Egyptian monasticism, it was modified in some important particulars. Asceticism was restrained, a mode of life reasonable in a northern climate was enjoined. Benedictinism counselled no flight from the world to solitary places, but it excluded the world from the cloister. The monk was not left free, like his Egyptian predecessor, to wander from place to place, but was bound under obedience to the abbot of the monastery in which he had made his profession, and the rule of the abbot was absolute. Yet it was a rule founded, and to be exercised continually, in the spirit of love. The ideal of the Benedictine monastery was that of a family, whose father was the abbot. If he exacted from his children a precise obedience, he was bound in turn to give them the watchful love and care of a father. In the opening words of the famous Rule the relation is precisely indicated: ' Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of thy Master, and incline the ear of thine

heart; willingly receive and faithfully fulfil the admonition of the loving Father.'

In this Benedictine conception of the monastery as a family guided by the father lay the secret of the transformation of the individualistic monasticism of the desert into a tremendous force, ready to be exercised in many ways for the service of the Church. The Benedictine Rule was no rigid code; it left monasteries free to undertake widely various works, adapted to the needs of the world about them. The worship of God was the first end, that divine service which was specifically termed the work of God, *opus Dei*. That discharged, there were many occupations to which the Benedictine might be assigned. The Benedictines became great scholars. They were great missionaries; we do not forget that the mission of S. Augustine was sent by Gregory from the great Benedictine monastery of S. Andrew which he had founded on the Celian Hill. The nations whom the Benedictine missionaries converted to Christianity have become the foremost nations of the world. They were pioneers of civilization, incidentally, reclaiming wastes, becoming ultimately great landlords, providing well for their neighbours in that capacity. Their freedom was evident in the variety of their achievement. The Rule aimed at making good men, and left the modes of their usefulness to the leading of circumstance, the guiding of God. The true spirit of Benedictinism is preeminently sane, cheerful, zealous, charitable. The true Benedictine seeks God through the renunciation of self and of the world, and finds in His service a perfect freedom.

But in the Benedictine system as its founder left it

there was a vulnerable point. That which was in general a strength occasionally became a fatal weakness. The independence of the monastery gave to Benedictinism a wonderful elasticity, a power of response to varying needs, and of development of varying capacities. But it prevented also the reformation from without of a house which had become lax. The autonomy of the monastic family in each abbey has been reaffirmed within the last twenty years as a foundation principle of the Order. And for nearly three centuries after S. Benedict's death it was an autonomy with which there was no suggestion of interference. Between monastery and monastery there was no organic relation, though there were all relations of charity and courtesy. Abbots might consult together, and agree upon customs, but no external authority could impose customs upon a particular house. The Benedictine life was therefore liable to fluctuation. There might be a long period of regularity, followed by a decline into laxity, which must await reformation until there came one of those spontaneous revivals which are strangely and happily characteristic of the Benedictine life.

To prevent these alternations, and to set a standard of monastic observance which should be secure against variation, two reforms were undertaken. In the ninth century the reform of Cluny attracted into a congregation a number of houses which became absolutely dependent upon Cluny. Cluny was the sole abbey, all other houses were priories subject to Cluny. The priors of the dependent houses were nominees of the Abbot of Cluny, not the elect of the houses. The profession of every monk in every priory, however

distant, was made in the name and with the sanction of the Abbot of Cluny. It was easy by this means to secure a regularity of observance and a similarity of custom throughout the whole congregation. But that which in name was a reform was in reality a revolution. The Cluniac system of dependencies cut at the very root of the Benedictine principle of the independent family life. 'By the very system the priors were but shadows of the Abbot of Cluny, and no house, not even the greatest monastery, had any inherent principle of life.' Yet the Cluniacs were always accounted Benedictines, because they followed the Rule, though they rejected the polity.

For two centuries and more the Cluniac congregation throve amazingly. Then came the decline, for the system had its weak point. All depended upon Cluny, and if the one abbey became lax, all the priories would become lax with it.

Acute minds might have foreseen the possibility of decline long before it came. But it was actually the laxity of Cluny which provoked the Cistercian reform, which, beginning within the Cluniac Order, detached itself, and assumed an independent life. The Cistercians were so far dependent upon the Abbey of Citeaux that it was held by them to be the mother and head of the whole Order. But whereas Cluny was rigidly monarchical, Citeaux was rather federal. Its system was that of paternity and filiation; every house was dependent upon the house from which it had been founded, and was visited by it for the purpose of maintaining discipline. Citeaux itself was visited by the four eldest daughter-houses. All Cistercian abbots came to Citeaux for the general Chapters; and the close

federation and the system of mutual visitation held at least the promise of sustained regularity of observance throughout the whole Order. The piety, the austerity, the learning of the first Cistercians, their fidelity to the primitive Benedictine spirit, won general admiration. The great Cistercian wave which swept over England in the first half of the twelfth century has left us our loveliest monastic ruins, the poor wrecks of great houses. But though the Benedictine Rule was followed by the Cistercians, the reform abandoned the Benedictine principle of the independent family no less completely than the Cluniac reform had done.

And, despite reforms which detached many houses from the original stock, Benedictinism still maintained itself. It stood always for the norm of Western life and observance. It proved almost miraculously capable of renewing its life from within itself. So, at the end of the twelfth century, it is chiefly Benedictinism that we find influencing the life of Umbria, with one exception to which we shall return. It was the form of dedicated life with which S. Francis became familiar; and it was to Benedictine charity that he was to be indebted for simple gifts which made his first foundations possible.

But the influence of Benedictinism was small enough, for the Church and the world were distracted with ills and unrest. At the end of the twelfth century there reigned one of the greatest of mediaeval Popes, Innocent III. Elected to the Papacy before he was forty, he had shown himself not only competent in political affairs but a man of deep and true religion, possessed by an ardent desire to reform the Christian world, himself untouched by its corruption. If we censure

his policy on doctrinal or ecclesiastical grounds, we must recognize that in all his efforts for the aggrandizement of the Papal power he was moved only by the sincere conviction that in the supremacy of the Roman See lay the only hope of the world's safety. It seemed to him that the supreme spiritual power must gather to itself all forces that made for faith and morality; that by every means the central authority must be made effective and far-reaching. 'He may have been wrong,' Father Cuthbert says, 'in thinking that temporal power would strengthen the Holy See for its spiritual mission; about that men will argue as long as the world lasts. But there can be no doubt that the ultimate purpose of the great Pope was to create a theocracy of the Christian nations under whose sway the Gospel would be better realized in all spheres of the world's life.' [1]

Yet even if the greater wars had been composed, the task of the appeasement of Italy would not have been completed. As a result of the long strife between Popes and Emperors the Italian cities had come to their freedom. Each side had continually made bids for their support; the cities were conscious of their value, and had gained independence, self-reliance, strength, and autonomy. Yet their strength was wasted, their happiness dissipated, in perpetual conflict among themselves. Each city, large or small, was continually at war with its neighbours. No pretext was too trivial for the resort to arms. Warfare between the cities was maintained, and excused by a long tradition, long after the rivalries between Pope and Emperor had ceased to be of real concern to the Italian burghers.

[1] Fr. Cuthbert: *Life of S. Francis of Assisi.*

No exterior authority could restrain these civic wars. Both Pope and Emperor claimed illimitable authority; neither was able to wield any real authority beyond the area actually occupied by its armed forces. Leagues and confederations between cities, formed for temporary ends, dissolved as soon as their purposes were accomplished. Nation and country, Pope and Emperor, were hardly more than names ; the political vision of the mediaeval Italian was bounded by the walls of his own city, whose autonomy and privileges and glory it was his sole thought to maintain against its neighbours.

And within the cities themselves arose a new strife, of the burghers against the nobles, who possessed land between the cities which the burghers coveted for their safety. Continual disputes issued in a chronic antagonism. The nobles fortified their palaces, and sought to divide a city against itself by winning adherents among the burghers to their own cause. All life was embittered by incessant conflicts, in which every weapon was used. Quarrels between the cities and in the cities, interdicts and excommunications from Rome, reprisals by the Emperor, the cruelty and tyranny of the nobles, the recurrence of famine and pestilence, kept burgher and peasant in continual ferment. Men despaired of the world and of the Church; in bitterness of mind and desolation of spirit they said that God and His saints slept.

Monasticism in Italy had ceased to be either an inspiration or a directing force. The salt had not wholly lost its savour, but could not stay corruption. The reforms of Cluny and Citeaux, never so powerful in Italy as in France and England, had died away.

The original Benedictinism remained much as it had been before the reforms were instituted. Yet never had the Church been in greater need of that vitalizing power which monasticism at its best can exert. The life of the Church was at many points as corrupt as that of the world which it was set to save. Simony was so rife that the Pope himself said that it could be extirpated only by fire and sword. Bishops strove among themselves, with jealous contention; they were at one only in their exactions from the clergy. The laity were as sheep without shepherds. If they still observed the precepts of the Church it was often from superstitious fear rather than from love or from reasoned conviction. Yet there was a vague expectation that either from the Orthodox Church of the East or from within the Church of the West there would arise some great impulse of purification and reform and renewal to life. If men joined this or that fanatical or penitential movement, it was because they thought that in them this hope might be fulfilled.

And of such movements, both within and without the Church, there was a considerable number. In the twelfth century Italy was greatly influenced by a revival of the old heresy of Manicheism. There was a strange vitality in this Eastern heresy which in the third century had imperilled the Church's existence, in the seventh century had revived, and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries had become dangerously vigorous in France and Italy. Its fundamental doctrine, derived ultimately from Persia, is that of Dualism, the assertion of a conflict between a good principle and an evil principle, the good principle being regarded as the creator of the invisible and spiritual universe, the bad

principle as the creator of the material world. All matter held the elements of evil. Therefore a rigid asceticism was necessary, the highest possible degree of abstention from material things, in which were immanent the elements of darkness. Those who took upon themselves the severest austerities and denials were the Cathari, the perfect, who could intercede for, and lift up and redeem, the imperfect.

In the Middle Ages the heresy found its chief victories in Southern France, among those who were named Albigenses. Both in France and in the Low Countries they were repressed with a severity shocking even for that age, a severity dictated by the realization that Manicheism, tinctured though it seemed to be with Christian ideas, was in truth the deadly foe of Christianity, a danger also to all political institutions. In Italy also there was a ruthless war against the Cathari, assembling in secret communities, infecting the general thought of the people by the quiet penetration of their ideas. At the time of S. Francis Catharist doctrines, in their integrity or in modified forms, were widespread, even among those who were not pledged adherents of the Catharist organizations.

Another movement of protest against the secularity of the Church and the wickedness of the age was the Waldensian, as definitely within Christianity as the heresy of the Albigenses was outside it. Waldes, a rich merchant of Lyons towards the end of the twelfth century, seeking through study of the Holy Scriptures the way of perfection, experienced a conversion similar to that of Francis. He too was moved by the words of Christ, ' If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.' He too made his

vow of utter poverty, and began to preach in public places. His teaching was in some points censured, and he and his followers, refusing to submit to authoritative ruling, were excommunicated in 1184. The movement remained coherent and increased. It won sympathy as a reaction against the splendour and worldliness of the Church. The profession of poverty and simplicity attracted adherents, precisely as that of the Franciscans did half a century later. The strict morality of the Waldensians won admiration. Though in schism, they preserved an ordered ministry; and though they rejected some doctrines, in reaction from the practical evils to which current teaching had given rise, they remained faithful to the great body of fundamental Christian doctrine. We may define them as Evangelical Protestants. It was a social movement no less than a religious; among the poor who were dissatisfied with their social and economic conditions it won many disciples.

The first Waldenses were not far from the Church, many of them continued to receive the sacraments at the hands of the clergy. They opposed as vigorously as the Church itself the heresy of the Albigenses and Cathari. Shortly before the conversion of S. Francis the Church had made an attempt to conciliate the Waldenses, organizing in 1208 a religious mendicant Order under the name of the Poor Catholics, intended to unite the Waldenses again with the Church, and to combat the Cathari. The Order lasted but a few years; the rise of the Dominicans and Franciscans diverted attention to movements which promised a greater vitality; and the elements which might have been, and perhaps in some cases had already been, a

strength to the Poor Catholics were absorbed in the orders of friars. But the Poor Catholics had shown the way of reformation.

A similar movement was that of the Humiliati, or Poor Lombards. They too were austere in life, insisting on the necessity of manual work, and evangelistic. They had fallen into schism, but in 1210 had been reconciled to the Church. They endured no longer than the Poor Catholics, but like them they had helped to prepare men's minds for the Franciscan movement.

Another protest against the laxity of the age, originating in the Cistercian Order, was destined both to prepare the way for the mission of S. Francis and—in a distortion of its teaching—to affect adversely Franciscanism of the second generation. In the latter part of the twelfth century Joachim, Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Corazzo, was led by his studies in the mystical interpretation of Scripture to frame a theory of three successive stages of the divine economy for the world, in relation to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. He conceived of the first age, that of the Church of the Old Covenant, as under the rule of the Eternal Father, a rule of power which inspired fear. The second age was that of the Church of the New Covenant, a dispensation of wisdom revealed in the Son, and mediated to the world through the Christian Church. The third age was to be the dispensation of universal love, a rule of the Holy Spirit, issuing from the Gospel but transcending the letter of it, and making unnecessary those disciplinary institutions which were characteristic of the Gospel in the Church. Joachim held that the second stage of this divine economy for the world was drawing to its close, and that the third

would shortly be ushered in by some great catastrophe, after which the divided East and West would be reunited, the Jews converted, and the ' Eternal Gospel ' abide until the end of the world.

This doctrine, stated by Joachim himself without any such obvious and fundamental error as would have procured its condemnation, was afterwards exaggerated by his followers, including a small group of Franciscans with whom S. Bonaventure had to deal when he became Minister-General of the Order. Joachim himself was a man of learning and of indisputable holiness, and his character won acceptance for his teaching. He founded no sect, he gathered no school of disciples, he was content to rule a house of the primitive Cistercian strictness in Calabria, and to submit all that he wrote to the judgement of Rome. But his teaching, popularized by some who misunderstood it, answered to the longings of a weary age. Men welcomed eagerly his prophecy of a new reign of the Holy Spirit, in which all the diseases of the age should be healed, and all men knit into a marvellous fellowship, and all live in a joyous kingdom of love. Devotees went about preaching what they supposed to be his doctrine, prophesying that sharp terror which should usher in the reign of love, calling men to repentance. One such preacher had appeared in Assisi when Francis was young, crying continually ' Peace and well-doing! ' The widespread ideas of Joachim had at least this effect, that they raised the minds of many men who despaired of the age to a high pitch of expectancy, of anticipation of some new and profoundly powerful movement of the Spirit. So when Franciscanism came to the birth in a new and

vigorous and entirely sincere Order, it was natural that it should be acclaimed by many as a proof that the kingdom of God was indeed being renewed in the world, cleansed and uplifted by a new inspiration.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, then, we see Italy, and the greater part of the civilized world, in tumult and confusion, political, moral, and spiritual. The Church was corrupt, and the monasticism which again and again had renewed its life was now too weak for a new effort. The great forces of the Empire and the Papacy were powerless for pacification, for they sought their own aggrandizement. It was a time, in Dr. Westcott's words, of intense, disordered, passionate feeling; a crisis of dissolution and a revelation of strength. Great things were to come in the immediate future, 'the foundations of the life of modern Europe, social, political, intellectual, religious, were laid there silently and deeply, laid by men who knew not whereunto their work would grow, laid in tribulation and perplexity.'[1] As the century went on art, literature, commerce were to come to undreamed developments; nations were to grow into the consciousness of common life. But the world to which S. Francis came seemed rather to be sick unto death than travailing in birth of a new life. He came as one of the messengers of the Most High, to remind the world of the fundamental truth which it had ignored, that only in the love of God can peace be attained, a love which sets aside all, ventures all, for His sake.

[1] Westcott: *Social Aspects of Christianity*.

II

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF S. FRANCIS

ASSISI lies on the eastern side of Umbria, some eighty miles north of Rome. It clings to a spur of the mountains of Subasio, dominated by the ruined citadel of Rocca, falling by many a terrace towards the fertile plain. It was a small but prosperous city in the days of the Roman Empire; it was the seat of a bishopric in very early days, giving two of its bishops as martyrs to the Kalendar of the Church. In the eighth century Assisi had been besieged by Charlemagne himself, and sacked by his fierce and terrible followers. It felt the full force of the wars between Pope and Emperor, Guelf and Ghibelline; it was subject to the oppression of the nobles. Nor could it escape the enmity of its neighbours. It shared the common experience in an age when conflict between cities was the salient feature of Italian life. Perugia was the age-long foe of Assisi. The two cities of the hills had been at daggers drawn ever since those days when, as an Etruscan city, Perugia hated Assisi for being Umbrian. Caught between Rome and the Empire, fighting against external oppression, torn by internal feuds, the Perugians had ever their swords in their hands. In the dawn of the thirteenth century Perugia was the chief city in Umbria; yet against her the

smaller Assisi maintained a gallant independence. The relation of animosity between the cities has its importance in the life of Francis; for, as we shall see, one of the many conflicts between the cities set him in the first stage of his conversion.

Notwithstanding the wastage of war, some degree of prosperity was known within the walls of Assisi. In contrast with the wretchedness of the large mass of the people, there was luxury among the nobles and the merchants. Of the latter class came Francis, with the former class his father's fortune enabled him to associate.

In the year 1182 Pietro Bernardone was a wealthy cloth-merchant of Assisi. In that age, and for long after, none were more prosperous than those who dealt in textiles. They were the bankers of their time; and since they travelled far for the conduct of their trade they transacted many kinds of business for others, and were everywhere welcome for the news that they brought and the ideas which they diffused. Pietro Bernardone was in Northern France when his son was born, and was baptized with the name of John at the font of San Rufino, the cathedral church of Assisi. On his return from France Pietro nicknamed the child Francesco, the Frenchman, and by that name he has always been known.

From the priests of San Giorgio Francis gained his education, which was but slight. To the current speech of Umbria he added Latin, then still lingering as the speech of the more formal occasions. In his home the French of Provence was spoken, it has been conjectured that his mother was of Provençal origin. He learned to read; that he wrote with some difficulty is

clear from a scrap of his laborious writing which is still preserved at Assisi, and from the fact that he usually dictated. For the rest, he ran free in the young life of Assisi, of which Thomas of Celano has little that is good to say.

As Francis grew to manhood he found that the natural gulf between the nobles and the burgesses of Assisi was bridged for him by the money which he could command, for Pietro's avarice was subdued by his pride in his son's social success. His own charm and accomplishment counted for more, he was not merely tolerated in the young life of Assisi, he became a leader of its revels. It is not to be concluded that he yielded to every temptation that crossed his path ; against the general phrases in which his early biographers condemn the excesses of Assisian youth may be set their insistence upon his chivalrous ideals and the fineness of his spirit. He was rather sensuous than sensual, protected against the grossest sins by a natural fastidiousness. Despite the luxurious self-pleasing of those years his mother kept a firm faith in his future; she would tell her neighbours that she was very sure that he would become a good Christian. For she saw in him signs of grace. Francis would spend freely upon himself and his companions, but he would never refuse an alms to the poor. The *Legend of the Three Companions* tells us that once when his father was absent, and Francis was alone with his mother in the house, he heaped the table with loaves. And when his mother asked why he set out so much bread, Francis answered that he did it as alms to be given to the poor, ' for that he was minded to give alms unto every man that did ask it for God's sake.'

The process of his conversion was gradual, and determined by several crises of fortune.

The first was a result of the age-long feud between Assisi and Perugia. An intermittent war of two years had ended in the defeat of the Assisians in a set battle, and Francis, then a youth of twenty, was among the prisoners taken by the Perugians. Long months of imprisonment did not break his spirit, but it told upon his health. When the prisoners were released, and Francis returned to Assisi, he was prostrated by a sudden and acute fever. As he lay sick, there came to him the vision of a life of higher purpose, of a quest more arduous, than any which he had yet enterprised. With convalescence the vision faded, he dreamed again his old dream of knightly adventure. But when he was able to go abroad, he went beyond one of the city gates, to see again the fair setting of mountain and plain in which the little city lies, and found no pleasure in the sight. 'The beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards and all that is fair to the eye, could in no way gladden him; amazed at the change which had so suddenly come upon him he thought those most foolish who could love these things.' He knew for the first time that neither the claims of the world, nor the loveliness of nature considered apart from God, could satisfy his soul.

Yet with returning strength he yearned to be again a man with men. Assisi was furnishing a contingent to the Papal forces in the south ; Francis was eager to gain his knighthood, and set out, magnificently equipped. In the company he found a knight of noble birth whose poverty appeared in his mean raiment. Impelled by compassionate generosity, Francis

made over to the knight all his splendid accoutrements, and went forward to Spoleto. There, as he lay in a mean inn, the fever returned upon him. He heard as in a dream a voice asking him whether it were better to serve the lord or the servant. 'Surely,' replied Francis, 'it were better to serve the lord.' 'Why, then,' asked the voice, 'dost thou make a lord of the servant?' And Francis answered in the very words of S. Paul, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' 'Return to the land of thy birth,' said the voice, 'and there it will be told thee what thou must do.' At dawn Francis mounted his horse and rode back to Assisi. Leaving the company of the knights he had left also his dreams of glory. But not yet was his path made plain, he awaited a further illumination.

He resumed the old life of revelry, yet without zest. Once, as he sat silent, his friends rallied him for a lover. 'In truth,' said Francis, 'I am thinking of a bride more noble and more beautiful and richer than you have ever seen.' It was his first thought of mystic espousal with the Lady Poverty. Clear and more clear came the call to a life apart from the world, but the manner of that life was not as yet made clear. He began to pray often in solitary places. He sought light in a pilgrimage to Rome, and found there a new sense of kinship with the poor, of whom for a whole day he made himself one, changing clothes with a beggar, asking alms at the door of S. Peter's, bearing rebuffs. Back again at Assisi, the new charity that burned within him enabled him to do a far more difficult deed. Meeting a leper, he flung him no careless alms, he dismounted from his horse, he kissed the hand of the leper, and himself took from the leper the kiss of peace.

In that act was a supreme conquest of self, a break with the old life. Never again did he look back.

Outside the city wall of Assisi there stood then, as there stands to-day, the little church of S. Damian. It was here that a new indication of the divine will came to Francis. The church then lay desolate, all but ruinous. Francis went in and prayed before the neglected altar, and as he prayed he seemed to hear a clear voice from the crucifix above it, 'Francis, go and repair My church, which as thou seest is falling utterly into ruin.' He resolved to obey the command, and as he set his will to obedience he became sensibly filled with a new love for his crucified Lord; 'from that hour,' the *Legend of the Three Companions* says, 'his heart was pierced and melted by the remembrance of the Lord's Passion.'

He understood the command to relate to the rebuilding of the material fabric of the church; and collecting stuffs from his father's store, in which he had perhaps a certain assigned interest as a partner, he rode to Foligno, sold both the cloth and the horse, returned to S. Damian, and offered the money to the priest of the church, asking that he might be allowed to lodge with him. The priest hesitated to accept so large a sum, Francis flung it upon a window-sill in the church, and after a short stay with the priest fled to a cave in the mountains to escape his father's anger. Thence he returned after some weeks, wan with hardship and spiritual stress, but determined now to face Assisi with the message that was upon him to deliver. He was greeted with taunts at his madness, with the flinging of mud and stones. His father imprisoned him in the house and loaded him with fetters, but his mother set

him free; and Pietro, seeing that he was not likely to move Francis from his resolve, offered that he should be at liberty to live his life after his own incomprehensible fashion, if he would forgo his inheritance and restore the money which he had received for the cloth. Francis thought nothing of the inheritance, but the money he could not restore, for it had been given to the church, and the furious Pietro brought against him an action for recovery in the bishop's court.

The citizens of Assisi crowded into the bishop's hall, consumed with curiosity. The bishop bade Francis give back the money, since, as he said, God did not desire to be served with goods which had perhaps been gained by injustice. In answer, Francis stripped himself naked, putting off even the hair shirt which he wore beneath his rich robe, and he called all to witness that he restored everything to his father, and that henceforth he would know but one father, the Father of us all. Pietro sullenly gathered up the money and the clothes, and went away, mocked by the bystanders, who in a sudden revulsion of feeling had taken Francis' part. The bishop, greatly moved, covered Francis with his own mantle, until there was brought the mean and rough tunic of a farm-labourer. Francis put it on, marked the tunic with a cross in chalk, and went forth. He had made, as it were, a religious profession. His renunciation was complete, he had espoused the Lady Poverty. Yet even that first habit was soon taken from him by robbers whom he met in the mountains; he was indebted to a monastery for the gift of a hermit's tunic, leathern girdle, shoes and staff.

Work lay to his hand, he knew what he must do.

S. Damian's must be repaired, he must tend the lepers, whose wasted bodies were forlorn temples of the Holy Ghost. His days were spent partly in mending the walls of the church, for which he begged stones in the city, partly in ministering to the lepers in their settlement. At first he accepted the simple meals which the priest of S. Damian's made ready for him; afterwards, desiring an even greater simplicity, he begged for scraps in the streets, making himself fellow with the very poorest. That was a bitter humiliation for Pietro Bernardone, who had formerly prided himself upon his son's easy conquest of Assisian society; he cursed Francis whenever they met in the streets, and in compensation Francis begged the blessings of the poor.

The work upon S. Damian's finished, Francis repaired another ruinous church, which has now disappeared, and then a third. This was a little wayside chapel called S. Mary of the Little Portion (Portiuncula), a most ancient shrine which to-day is reverenced throughout the world as the cradle of the Franciscan family. It was already old when S. Benedict passed that way, and, resting there for a time, himself restored two doorways which still exist. It had long been neglected when Francis began to repair its crumbling walls.

By the beginning of the year 1209 the chapel was again serviceable, and Mass was occasionally said there by a friendly priest. Francis was awaiting further guidance. It came to him on the feast of S. Matthias. The Gospel which he heard at Mass was from that tenth chapter of S. Matthew's Gospel which tells of the sending of the Twelve to proclaim the kingdom of

God, without money or shoes or staves or scrip. 'This,' cried Francis, 'is what I desire, yea, this is what I long for with my whole heart.' He took the precept as a command personal to himself, and gave to it the most literal obedience, putting off his shoes, laying aside his staff, changing for a rough rope the leathern girdle which the monks had given him. Day after day he went up into Assisi, speaking to this man and that of penitence and love and peace. He soon found companions to share his poverty, and to declare the love of God to man. For their lodging he built huts beside the chapel of S. Mary of the Little Portion, their walls of wattle and daub, their roofs of thatch.

The first three companions were men whose vocation Assisi would note with interest. Bernard was of Francis' own class, a merchant, and wealthy. Peter was a learned doctor of Bologna. Giles was neither wealthy nor learned, a simple countryman, though of shrewd judgement and homely wit. This new way of life, then, was evidently one to which any man might be called, be he merchant or scholar or peasant. And so, many followed the first three. There was as yet no thought of founding a religious order. The life to which these Penitents of Assisi felt the call was as yet undefined, it was a following of Francis. It was widely different from any life which had been lived under monastic rule in Western Christendom for the last five hundred years, though it had affinities with early monasticism both in East and West. If Francis already spoke of his family as an order, it was rather as an order of spiritual chivalry, they were Knights of Christ, questing, adventuring for His sake.

Two and two the four went out, preaching repen-

tance. At first the only visible result was the attraction of others to their company, all of them men of the neighbourhood. In Assisi there was again a revulsion of feeling against Francis, his Brethren were refused the alms which had hitherto been freely given. Even the friendly Bishop of Assisi urged Francis to reconsider his way of life. How, he asked, could men live without a house, without possessions of any kind? Francis replied that only so could they be free, that if they had property they would have need of arms for its defence, for property was the very source of quarrels and lawsuits, and the love of God and of one's neighbour usually found obstacles therein. That was why he and his Brethren did not desire worldly goods. The Bishop was silent, he knew that the religious houses in his own diocese were constantly engaged in litigation over property, and he made no further effort to dissuade Francis from following his ideal.

The little company had now grown to a dozen in number, dwelling round the Little Portion when they were not preaching the Kingdom, worshipping in their little chapel. It was a place of peace. Here the strife of city against city, of Emperor against Pope, penetrated only as a faint, unheeded sound. Hither they returned from their missionary journeys, 'and when they beheld one another again they were filled with such gladness and rejoicing as that naught was had in remembrance by them of the things that they had suffered from evil men.' They worked with their hands to earn their bread and to drive away slothfulness. They served one another with affection, 'such charity did burn within them that it seemed easy unto them to yield their bodies unto death, not for the love

of Christ alone, but also for the salvation of the souls, nay, even of the bodies also of their brethren.' They abounded in humility and charity and obedience, they had all things in common.

But Francis was of clearer vision than to think that all would continue thus for ever, he foresaw a time when with the increase of numbers there would come a decline of the first zeal, and he began to think how best to provide for the future stability of his little company, and how to provide for the unification of its life by giving to it a simple Rule.

He set out for Rome. There, by good fortune, was the Bishop of Assisi, who commended him to the Cardinal John of S. Paul, and he was able, after a first rebuff, to lay his hopes and ideals before the Pope. Innocent III was both a man of affairs and a mystic. When his cardinals argued that such a way of life as Francis proposed was impracticable and dangerous, he bade them beware lest so thinking they offended against the Gospel of Christ Himself, since it would be blasphemy to say that the observance of evangelical perfection was either impossible or unreasonable. He bade Francis pray that Christ would show him His will more clearly, that he might be able to give a formal sanction to Francis' Rule. When Francis presented himself before the Pope a second time the Rule which he had written was approved, and the Pope blessed him and his work.

This Primitive Rule was but the germ of the Franciscan Rule as it afterwards took shape ; even within the lifetime of Francis it received additions of a practical kind. Franciscan scholarship has critically distinguished the Primitive Rule from the additions, and

there is little doubt as to its content and text. It was not so much a formulated Rule of life, or a constitution, as a statement of ideals proposed to the Franciscan Brother as his aim. It consisted in great part of those words of Christ which relate to renunciation of the world and the embracing of poverty for His sake. The Rule lays down that the postulant shall sell all that he has and give the proceeds to the poor; that he shall carry nothing with him; that he shall work in the craft which he knows, if it be an honest one; and that in all things he shall follow the humility and poverty of the Lord Jesus. The Brethren are forbidden to have any power or domination among themselves. They are warned not to calumniate any, or to contend in words; and to hold in respect the order and office and administration of the clergy in all those matters which regard the salvation of the soul.

After the approbation of the Rule, Francis and the Brethren lived for a time at Rivo Torto, a little way from the first settlement. They still worshipped at the Little Portion, but they perhaps feared that a continuous occupation of their first group of huts might seem to assert some right in them, contrary to the spirit of their Rule.

Francis began to speak in Assisi, not only in its open places but in the churches, and even in the cathedral itself, upon the invitation of the Canons. Now at last his position was established, he had won the admiration of his fellow-citizens. He had but one message, and the manner of it was homely enough. Its power lay in his personality, not in any quality of rhetoric. His words brought peace to a city which, when it was not distracted by external wars, was rent

by internal strife. Men acted upon his bidding to give up their ill-gotten gains, to renounce their quarrels, to be reconciled with their enemies. He so wrought upon the mind of the city that he healed its chief disorder, nobles and burgesses entered into a formal pact of peace.

But it was not long before the Brothers returned from Rivo Torto to the Little Portion, now assigned to their perpetual use by the Abbot of Mount Subasio. Whatever charges may be brought against the monasticism of the time, the constant kindness of the Benedictines to the early Franciscans is to be remembered with gratitude. 'Behold, Brother,' said the Abbot to Francis, 'we grant that which thou dost ask. But if it happen that the Lord shall multiply your congregation, we will that this place shall be the head of all places that you have.' So it has been. At the Little Portion Francis lived and prayed and died; to it all look who love the name of Francis. As the *Mirror of Perfection* says:

> Fallen it lay when Francis did upraise it,
> Of the three churches his own hand rebuilded
> Choosing this one wherein to don the sackcloth,
> Binding the flesh in fetters of the spirit.
>
> Here was the old world's broad highway made narrow,
> Here the way broader for the Chosen People;
> Here grew the Rule; here Poverty, our Lady,
> Smiting down pride, called back the Cross amongst us.
>
> Francis sore troubled, weary of his burden,
> Here findeth peace; his sorrows here have healing;
> Here is the truth made clear whereof he doubted,
> Here all the father prayeth for is granted.

The Brethren held the Little Portion not as of their own possession, but as for their use, sending each year

a basket of fish as its rent to the Abbot of Mount Subasio. They built no house, but such additional huts of branches and earth as had been their first shelter; when at last a house was built it was the citizens of Assisi who raised it, even in face of Francis' protests. By day the Brothers worked in the fields for their neighbours, and in the houses of Assisi as servants, taking no money in payment, but only food which they might share when they returned in the evening to the common meal in the Little Portion. When work lacked, and only then, they begged their bread in humility; though we call the Franciscans a mendicant Order Francis' intention for them was that they should earn their living by labour. Their charity was the tending of lepers, of whom there was a neighbouring settlement, in the care of a nursing Order called the Cross-bearers. It was an austerely simple life, but the spirit of the family of Francis rose high above all thought of hardship. They were not in fetters to their poverty; it seemed to them not a hard thing but a gracious; its acceptance meant to them the winning of freedom from many cares and many kinds of temptation; it was a new liberty to follow Christ.

To this period belongs that remarkable accession to the Franciscan family which led to the foundation of the Second Order of S. Francis, known as the Poor Ladies, or to-day as the Poor Clares. Clare, now in her eighteenth year, was a daughter of a noble house in Assisi, from her youth devoted to the service of the poor. At the beginning of the year 1212 Francis had returned from preaching missions in Tuscany, and great crowds were again listening to him in his own city. Clare's sympathy with the poor had already

suggested to her a life of poverty for herself, Francis seemed to embody her ideal, and to be such a spiritual guide as she needed. It is probable that the Bishop of Assisi had some knowledge of her longing, and that he approved the meetings in which Francis instructed Clare in the way of poverty to which he had been called. There was no hope that her family would approve or sanction her vocation, they had dreamed of a notable marriage for her, and on the night of Palm Sunday Clare stole out of her father's house, and in the presence of all the Brothers made her profession at the Little Portion, and was immediately committed by Francis to the care of the Benedictine nuns of the neighbouring convent of Bastia, and thence to the convent of S. Angelo, where she was joined by her sister Agnes. Neither the entreaties nor the violence of their relatives availed to shake the resolve of the two girls; and after a short stay in the convent Clare was given by the generous Benedictines of Mount Subasio the little church of S. Damian, with a house attached to it. There she was joined by companions ; under the general direction of Francis she shaped a simple Rule for their life, and three years after her profession she won from Rome a recognition of her Order, and leave to live the life of absolute poverty. In days to come, when weaker spirits were working for a mitigation of Francis' Rule for the Brothers, the simple fidelity of the Poor Clares was to prove a support for those who strove to maintain the strict observance.

A few months later Francis dreamed of a chivalrous adventure in the East. Western Christendom was resolute in its attempt to overthrow the infidels by force of arms, to expel them from the Holy Land. Francis

desired rather to convert them to the faith of Him Who had made that land holy. A storm in the Adriatic brought to nothing his first attempt to reach Palestine; he accepted the failure, and set himself again to the task of renewing Christian devotion in his own land.

In the year 1215 he is found again at Rome. The approbation of new religious orders was to be discussed by the Fourth Lateran Council, and Francis was there to represent his own company. When the matter came up Innocent III confirmed his earlier and verbal approbation of the Rule of Francis, and also sanctioned the life of the Poor Clares. One incident of that visit is memorable. Dominic Guzman, representing the Order of Preachers, was there also; the two founders of the two great orders of friars met; the supreme art of Della Robbia has immortalized for us their embrace. So great was the reverence of Dominic for Francis that he would have united their followers in one order; but they were seeking to attain the same end by very different means, and the fusion would have been quite impracticable. Yet each reacted permanently upon the other, the Dominicans learned poverty from the Franciscans, the Franciscans rivalled the Dominicans in the pursuit of learning.

At the Whitsuntide of 1217 the entire brotherhood met in a general Chapter at the Little Portion, housed in a multitude of temporary booths. The fellowship of poverty had grown so large that further organization was necessary, the complete simplicity of the family was no longer possible. Provinces were assigned, and over each a Provincial Minister was appointed. Missions to countries beyond the Alps were planned, and the Brothers were sent forth to them, with the blessing

of Francis, to preach peace and repentance as they had been preached in Umbria and Tuscany, and to chant the praises of voluntary poverty. One result of this wider diffusion was an enormous increase in the number of the Brethren; at the famous Chapter of Mats held two years later no fewer than five thousand friars assembled. And there was the beginning of unrest. Some contended that absolute poverty could not be required of all; that human learning, which was but one form of divine illumination, must not wholly be set aside; in fine, that the ideals of Francis must be modified to meet the new conditions. But for the moment the party of the primitive spirit prevailed.

Among the missions which were approved at this Chapter were two of singular importance to the Order. Five friars were sent on a mission to Morocco ; all witnessed by their lives to the Faith, and were the first of many Franciscan martyrs. Francis himself announced that he would go again to the East, on that quest which formerly had been attempted and had failed.

He went by way of Cyprus to join the crusading army before the walls of Damietta. There he found that all that way of life for which the Cross stands had been set at nought by those who bore it as their standard. The Christian camp was infested by every form of vice. Francis could not believe that victory would crown their arms in the great assault which the Crusaders were preparing to deliver upon the city; he foretold their defeat, and sick at heart he witnessed their overthrow. It seemed to him that the failure of their arms might open the way to a mission of peace. Taking his life in his hands he entered the enemy

lines, and was brought into the presence of the Sultan of Egypt, Melek-el-Kamil. He was received with a high courtesy, the Sultan listened with sympathetic interest as he set forth the faith of Christ. Francis won by his courage and simplicity the admiration of all who heard him. Gifts were pressed upon him, which he declined, and a safe conduct ensured his return to the Crusaders' camp. In a second assault Damietta was taken, but Francis would not stay with those who had so betrayed the Christian name. He went on to the Holy Places in Palestine, of which Franciscans have for centuries been the appointed guardians for the Latin Church, in memory of their founder's pilgrimage. Two mysteries of the Faith had ever been the supreme object of Francis' devotion, the Incarnation and the Passion; we may imagine with what joy he knelt in the stable-cave at Bethlehem, and by the tomb over which rises the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in a truer sense than any other the Mother and Mistress of all Churches.

He returned to Italy to find his Order sharply divided. In his absence its affairs had been administered by two Vicars-General. They had framed for it constitutions at variance with the character which Francis had striven to imprint upon his family, constitutions of which the acceptance would mould it more closely to the normal forms of religious life. Those who clung to the precepts of Francis were being persecuted by the dominant party, the party of the betrayal. His return changed for a time the course of events. A General Chapter was summoned, to consider a revised Rule which Francis had drawn up in the interests of peace, and which reaffirmed the

simple first principles of the Franciscan life. But the direction of his family had slipped from his hands. He had enjoined that among them there was to be no domination ; yet one was now governing, and in a spirit opposed to that of the founder. The sinister character of Brother Elias was conjoined with a real ability, and with an indomitable will. As Vicar-General he had assumed the government of the Order, imposing upon it his own conception of what it should be. Henceforward Francis is the founder, increasingly he is the saint, but he is no longer the father of the united family, exercising an authority, receiving an obedience, of love. More and more, with the approval of Rome, the Order took on the characteristics of a modified monasticism, the primitive spirit was overlaid by a formulated observance.

The society which derived from him its being and its inspiration moved on its way without him. The Little Portion now recalled to him a past almost dead. Many were faithful, but most had fallen away. He whose whole soul had been joy now felt the bitterness of dereliction. It seemed to him that those who had been set as examples of light had themselves become darkness. He would not listen to those who bade him reassert himself, rally to himself those throughout the Order who clung to the old ideals. ' Let them do as they will,' he said of those who had seized power. He would not risk a schism by deposing them, for he believed that when disorder and laxity had run their course the primitive spirit would revive, and the Order be sound again. All that he would do was to give permission to those who wished to keep the primitive Rule in its strictness to separate themselves, in case

of absolute necessity, from those who did not observe it. He set the duty of loyalty to the first Rule above the duty of loyalty to the existing community.

But he would make one more effort for peace. Time after time he had withdrawn himself from the Brethren, to seek in solitary places that which was no longer found among them. Now he went with two of his earlier companions to a cave in the mountains near Rieti. In prayer and fast he applied himself to the task of framing a revised Rule, by which, if it pleased God, the Friars Minor might yet be recovered both to the primitive observance and to unity among themselves. His task ended, he gave the new Rule to Brother Elias at the Little Portion. In a few days he was told that it had been accidentally lost; the loss was neither surprising, nor unwelcome to the party of Elias. Again Francis dictated the Rule, and this time he wisely went to Rome to secure its approbation. It established the primitive principle of absolute poverty, and that had been Francis' chief anxiety.

From that moment his old courage and joy revived. Peace came again to him, even amid sorrow for the defection of some from the spirit of his Order. He believed firmly that God would provide for the Franciscan family, and that He would accomplish His will for men through the vocation of the friars.

Francis took no further part in the affairs of the Order. At times he preached in the towns and villages of Umbria; at other times he withdrew himself to those remote cells in the mountains where he was sure of finding Brothers of a simplicity still untouched. He was still young in years, but the body no longer responded to the immense demand that he made upon

it; the outward man was failing, but the inward man was renewed day by day. And upon his work was to be set, even physically, the seal of that Passion of the Crucified to which his whole being had been devoted since his conversion.

In the August of 1224, a year memorable for the first coming of his friars to England, Francis was on Mount Alverna, in a place of retreat which had long ago been assigned to him by the lord of that region. With him were five or six of his early companions, Brethren whom he could implicitly trust. In a little hermitage somewhat apart from their lodging he meditated continually upon the Passion, and encountered the supreme trial of the mystic in that dark night of the soul through which he must pass to complete submission and to the consciousness of union. And on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross there came to him the vision of a seraph, imprinting upon his hands and feet and side the very marks of the nails of the Passion.

To the fact of the stigmata, if we care to investigate it, the evidence is good beyond question. It is accepted even by those naturally predisposed against miracle, by those who, with M. Paul Sabatier, give to the stigmata that rational explanation which the progress of science makes possible. There are many indisputable instances of stigmatized saints; and even if the view be taken that stigmata are physical results of intense devotion to the Passion, we are compelled to admit that the degree of devotion which can produce such an effect may itself be taken as a miracle of grace.

To Francis the vision and its results were as secrets of the King. From those nearest to him the stigmata

were not, for they could not be, concealed. But they were not as yet matters of proclamation.

He returned to the Little Portion, but as one who knows that his time is short, almost immediately set out on another missionary journey. It was soon ended by severe sickness, and to sickness was added the failure of his eyesight. Cardinal Ugolino, the friend and protector of Francis through all vicissitudes for many years, bade him come to Rieti, to be treated by a skilled physician of the Papal Court. He could go at first no further than S. Damian's. There, in a hut hastily built for him in the garden of the convent, he was tended by faithful Brothers, and by Clare, faithful as they to his ideals. Pain had no mastery of his spirit. Blindness could not lessen his delight in those remembered beauties of earth which had ever been to him reflections of the eternal loveliness. It was in the garden of S. Damian that Francis first sang that marvellous song of praise of created things, the Canticle of Brother Sun, which witnesses to his indomitable joy.

Most high, almighty and most gracious Lord, Thine are praise, glory and honour and all benediction.

For to Thee alone, most high, do they belong, and there is no man worthy to make mention of Thy Name.

Praised be Thou, O Lord, of all Thy creatures, and above all of Brother Sun, that doth light us with the dawning of the day.

For he is bright and fair, and the brightness of his glory doth reveal Thee, O Thou most high.

Praised be Thou, my Lord, of Sister Moon, and the stars that Thou hast shapen in heaven, bright and precious and fair.

Praised be Thou, my Lord, of Brother Wind, and of the air, and of the clouds, and of the clear sky, and all weathers, by which Thou doest nourish all Thy creatures.

Praised be Thou, my Lord, of Sister Water, for she is most useful, and humble, precious and pure.

Praised be Thou, my Lord, of Brother Fire, by whom Thou dost lighten our darkness, and fair is he and merry, masterful and strong.

Praised be Thou, my Lord, of Sister Earth, our mother that doth sustain us and keep us, and doth bring forth divers fruits, and many-coloured flowers, and the grass.
O Creatures, praise ye and bless my Lord, and give thanks unto Him, and serve Him in all humbleness.

There he provided once again for the pacification of Assisi, torn now by a strife between the Bishop and the burgesses, sending out his Brothers to sing a stanza which he had added to the Canticle of Brother Sun :

Praised be Thou, my Lord, for those who grant pardon for love of Thee,
And bear weakness and buffetings ;
Blessed are they who abide in peace,
For they shall be crowned by Thee, the Most High.

Somewhat recovered by tendance, he went forward by slow stages to Rieti. There his sufferings were only increased by the rude surgery of the day. To Siena they carried him, still in search of a skill sufficient to his increasing need of it. But Francis himself knew that their care was in vain. He would die at Assisi, and thither at last they bore him back, lodging him in the Bishop's palace.

From his couch he gave counsel to the family for which his love burned ever more brightly as the days passed, and the counsel was mainly of poverty and of the maintenance of mutual love. The Chapter met at Whitsuntide; he bade the friars remember always the reverence due to God for His gift in the Blessed Sacrament. As he saw that the physicians discerned the approach of death he added yet another stanza to the Canticle of Brother Sun:

Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for our Sister the death of the body,
From whom no man living can flee.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin,
But blessed be they that shall walk according to Thy holy will,
To them the second death shall do no hurt.

Yet even the dear city of Assisi was less meet for his death-place than that in which he had gathered the first sons of his family, in those days of joyous simplicity. He wished to die at the Little Portion, and he was carried there on a litter, by the road which his feet had so often trodden. Beside the road, at a point midway between the city gate and the Little Portion, stood the hospital of the Cross-bearers, where Francis had been wont to serve the lepers. There he bade his Brothers turn and set down the litter, with his face toward Assisi. With difficulty he raised himself upon the bed; then he lifted his hand, signed with the wound of the Crucified, in a last blessing of the beloved city which he could no longer see. 'Lord,' he said, 'whereas this city was of old, as I believe, the place and habitation of wicked men, so now do I see that by reason of Thine abundant mercy in Thine own good time Thou hast shown forth the multitude of Thy mercies therein above all other cities, and by reason of the goodness thereof alone hast chosen her unto Thyself to be the place and habitation of them that in truth should acknowledge Thee and give glory to Thy holy Name, and make manifest unto all Christian people the sweet savour of good report, holy life, and Gospel perfection. Wherefore I beseech Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, father of mercies, that Thou remember not our ingratitude, but ever bear in mind the abundant pity that Thou hast shown forth in her, that she may be for ever the place and habitation of them that do truly acknowledge Thee and glorify Thy blessed and most glorious Name from everlasting unto everlasting. Amen.'

During the few days of life that remained to him

the Brothers took down from his lips his last profession of faith, his memory of the call to him, his will for the future life of his friars, not, he protested, another Rule, but a remembrance of the Rule by which they professed to live, ending with a benediction upon all who should follow it faithfully.

One human note is clearly heard in the story of those last days. At Rome Francis had often been befriended by a rich lady, Giacoma di Settesoli, a woman so strong of character, so devoted to the first Brothers, that she was known among them as Brother Jacoba. Francis now bade a letter be written to let her know his state, to ask her to come to take farewell of him, and to bring with her haircloth in which to wrap his body, wax for the burial tapers, and some of that marchpane which she used to make for him in Rome. But as the messenger went out with the letter, the Lady Giacoma herself arrived at the door, bringing the very things for which Francis had asked. Another woman to whom he owed much could not take her farewell, Clare lay in her convent stricken with sickness.

As he grew weaker he bade them lay him on the ground, upon sackcloth. He died as they were reading to him the Passion from the Gospel of S. John. So, as the earliest of the chroniclers wrote, within a year of Francis' death, Francis 'passed away unto the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength he loved with the most ardent desire and fullest affection; following Him most perfectly, running after Him most swiftly, and in the end most gloriously overtaking Him, Who with the Father and the Holy

Ghost ever liveth and reigneth from everlasting to everlasting.'[1]

That night all Assisi streamed out to the Little Portion to see the body of the saint, with its seals of the Passion. On the morrow they bore the body to the church of S. George within the city, taking the longer way by S. Damian and bearing it for a moment into the convent church, that Clare might look her last upon Francis. Six years later S. Francis, for the Church had canonized him within two years of his death, was buried deep in the rock under the double church of San Francesco, the rich offering of Western Christendom to the memory and honour of one who in life had served the Lady Poverty of his mystic espousal.

[1] *The Mirror of Perfection.*

III

THE SPIRIT AND MESSAGE OF S. FRANCIS

IT is customary to speak of the soul of man as seeking after God. It is also justifiable, many phrases of Holy Scripture come instantly to mind which warrant us in so speaking. Yet we should be gravely in error if we conceived of that seeking as an act originating in the will of man, if we did not remember the prevenient grace of God which disposes man to that search, and the search of God Himself for man. It has been well said that—

'It is in God and not in man that religion must find its centre. Obvious as the assertion is, it has nevertheless needed affirming again and again. . . . The danger, which finds its most characteristic expression in Pelagianism, of putting man, with his human effort, in the central place is one which constantly recurs. But man's struggle towards the light, however patient, however heroic, however pitiful, is not the central fact of the universe. Not man's quest for God, but God's quest for man is the key and explanation of human life. The shepherd going out into the wilderness for the sheep that is lost, the father hastening to meet the prodigal, the royal host sending out to the hedges and by-ways to compel men to come in—these are the essential images of the Christian Gospel. "God

so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." '[1]

Francis Thompson, in *The Hound of Heaven*, has revealed to many for the first time the true nature of that quest, portraying the soul which flees and hides, which can find no shelter or content, until it is overtaken by the Divine Pursuer Who is also the Pursued, Who has Himself been from the first the real, though the unrealized, object of the quest.

The conversion of Francis is a clear instance of this quest. In him there was at first no hunger of soul after the living God, he was arrested in the midst of a life of pleasure. He had dreamed far other things for himself than the things which he came to do; he had boasted that by the way of knighthood he would become a great prince, before whom all the world would bow in homage. So clear was his own ideal for himself that his conversion needed for its accomplishment three stages, the quest of God three separate findings of Francis, his own dreams three awakenings to reality, before he came to make the final response.

Writers on the mystical life distinguish between those mystics whose dominant spiritual apprehension is that of the absolute Being of God and of the soul's union with Him, and those whose apprehension is that of a direct personal communion with our Lord, God Incarnate; the theocentric of whom S. Augustine is representative, the Christocentric of whom S. Catherine of Siena is typical. Francis was of the latter class. His early education had given him no training in abstract thought, neither theology nor philosophy lay

[1] L. W. Grensted: *The Inner Life.*

within the limits of his intellectual interests. And the crises of his conversion were determined by successive experiences which led him to realize God in and through Christ; he conceives of God's will as revealed to him definitely through the crucifix in the church of S. Damian, or through the very words of Christ speaking to his soul from the pages of the Gospel. Thenceforth he is the bondslave of Christ, his Master and Lord. Seeing Him, he sees the Father. And he experiences union with God in fellowship with the Incarnate, and in the closest and most literal following of our Lord's earthly life.

This Christocentric life finds its characteristic devotional expression. Francis finds in the contemplation of the Passion his continual spur and solace ; yet the Passion considered only as the culmination of the atoning life. The sweet sanity which pervaded all his thought and action saved his devotion from becoming unbalanced. We shall not forget that to him Western Christendom owes one of its most popular and touching devotions, that which is made around the Christmas Crib; any more than we shall forget the close and early association of Franciscanism with that other popular devotion of the Stations of the Cross. The Christmas Crib recalls still, to those who honour the memory of Francis, the period when he had won from Rome the approbation of his Rule, and yet, uneasy among Brethren who had begun to depart from his ideals, sought retreat in the valley of Rieti with one or two whom he could still trust. There his spirit revived, and as he kept the Advent of the year 1223 his thoughts went back to that cave at Bethlehem where, four years before, he had praised God for the

wonder of the Nativity, kneeling where the Lord was born.

The thought came to him that devotion might be quickened by the vivid representation of the Lord Jesus in the humility of His infancy. He sent for his friend Giovanni, who had built and given Francis a little hermitage in the woods overhanging Greccio, and said to him : ' I will to commemorate that Child Who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes the hardships of His infancy, how He lay in a manger on the hay, with the ox and ass standing by. If you will, let us keep this feast at Greccio, and do you go and make ready as I bid you.' Giovanni went back to Greccio, and made in the woods near the hermitage a stable with a manger, and set up an altar near it. It was announced that a midnight Mass of Christmas would be celebrated there; and on Christmas night the people climbed up from the town, and the hermitage and all the hill-side glowed with the flames of the torches which they carried. The Mass was sung. Francis himself read the Gospel, and after it spoke to the people of the mystery of the Incarnation; of the wonder of that silent night cleft by the song of angels, of the poverty of the Holy Child and His Mother in the stable cave where he himself had knelt, of the simplicity of the poor shepherds who were the first to greet Him; and Francis moved to great devotion all who heard him. Little wonder that men said afterwards that as he had turned to the image of the Child Jesus in the manger, and had spoken the Holy Name, the image seemed to wake to life, and to stretch out little hands to Francis. At least from that Christmas Christ was born anew in many hearts, and the

mystery of the Incarnation revived in power over men and women distracted by the spiritual and temporal evils of the age.

It is of his devotion to the mystery of the Passion of which his companions most often speak. The voice which he heard in his inmost soul as he knelt before the crucifix in the church of S. Damian, the vision of the Crucified which was vouchsafed to him as he prayed in a solitary place in the early days of his conversion, gave a lifelong direction to his devotion; so that, as S. Bonaventure says, 'his soul was melted within him, and so deeply was the remembrance of Christ's Passion printed inwardly on his heart that from that hour whensoever he recalled the crucifixion of Christ he could scarcely refrain from tears and from groaning aloud'; and, as the *Legend of the Three Companions* says, 'ever while he lived he did bear in his heart the Stigmata of the Lord Jesus, even as did thereafter most evidently appear from the renewal of those same Stigmata in his body, miraculously wrought and most clearly set forth. . . . With tears, and with abstinence from food and drink, he did mortify himself in memory of the Lord's Passion . . . so that after the vision and speech of the image of the Crucified he was ever conformed unto the Passion of Christ until his death.' The early chronicles continually insist on the fervour of Francis in this special devotion, proceeding from his intense realization of the truth that God's love to man is summed in the suffering and death upon the Cross.

By this example of devotion to the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Passion Francis unconsciously helped to stay the progress of the Catharist heresy.

Men's minds were recalled to the fundamental truths of the Gospel. They saw that to Francis and his Little Brothers these truths were life, and the inspiration of life. The created world could not itself be evil, or derive from any principle of evil, since the Son of God had taken upon Himself our flesh, and in it had suffered that He might redeem man. If it be ever thought that the devotion of Francis was unduly concentrated upon the humanity or the sufferings of Christ, it must be remembered that a reassertion of the principle of the Incarnation and the truth of Atonement was supremely necessary to combat the special heresy of that age.

This firm hold on the doctrine of the Incarnation lifted Francis safely over the stumbling-blocks to faith in which his age abounded. It could not then have been easy for mysticism to find its balance in institutionalism. Francis was under no temptation to see the Church otherwise than as the Body of Christ, or the sacramental system as anything else than the extension of the Incarnation. It needed the clear eye of faith to discern the true character of the Church, and her essential being, in an age when she was corrupted by every kind of abuse, torn by dissensions, powerless to protest effectively against the wickedness by which she was surrounded, and indeed infected, forgetful of her mission to convert the world. Francis did not shut his eyes to the evil in her, but he looked steadfastly at the good, at that which still bore witness to the indwelling of Christ in His Church, to His patience with men. At the beginning of his conversion he had been directed to those who, amidst all the corruption of the Church, were faithful to

the ideals of her ministry; the Bishop of Assisi had been to him a father and protector; the simple priest of S. Damian's had given him charitable shelter; at Rome he had found Innocent III a man of true religion, who yearned for the purification of the Church which he had been called to rule. Francis taught, and showed by constant example, respect for the Church and reverence for the priesthood. When he and his Brothers encountered priests of unworthy life, they refused to see aught but the character impressed upon them, the office which they held. To some who gave ill report of a priest Francis replied, 'I know not whether his manner of life be worthy of respect or otherwise; but this I know, that his hands convey the sacraments to many people and bring salvation to their souls; therefore will I kiss his hands in all reverence.' To his Little Brothers he said, 'We are sent to succour the clergy for the salvation of souls, and whatsoever in them is found wanting should be supplied by us. Cover their failings, and supply their many defects; and when ye have done this, be ye therefore yourselves the more humble.'

He showed the truest wisdom in moving unworthy priests to repentance by expecting the best of them. The churches in which even the unworthiest ministered were to him indeed holy places; we owe to Francis—it is recorded in his Testament—the familiar prayer which he was accustomed to make when he entered a church: 'We adore Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Thy churches which are in all the world; and we bless Thee because by Thy holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.' He was never betrayed by the thought of the many graces of conscious union

with God which were vouchsafed to him into thinking that the sacraments were less needful; they were to him the most real communications of divine grace and love. He bade men always to honour and reverence the holy mysteries.

It is beyond the purpose of the present pages to examine closely the nature and progress of S. Francis' mystical experience, to distinguish its stages of purgation, of illumination, of union, growing more and more sustained until after the vision on Mount Alverna it became habitual. It need only be said that the stage of union was entered soon after the completion of his conversion. Then, no longer egocentric but Christocentric, conformed to Christ and in Him a new creature, the consciousness of union was almost immediately realized. Before he was joined by even the first of his companions he passed a whole night in prayer so independent of words that the repetition of 'My God and my All!' sufficed for its expression. The stages of the mystical experience are in a sense successive; without purgation there can be no illumination, without illumination there can be no union. But the stages are not rigidly defined, the experiences are not mutually exclusive or incompatible. Even for him who has attained union there will be purgation, there will be further degrees of illumination.

S. Paul is among the first of Christian mystics, as he is among the first of evangelicals; and it is in the great Pauline phrases that the experience of Francis becomes intelligible. 'I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me' is the key to them all. The service of Christ was to Francis also, and already, 'the liberty

of the glory of the children of God.' No pressure of outward ill or circumstance or sadness could separate him from the love of Christ, he knew that 'all things work together for good to them that love God.' To be 'filled with all the fullness of God' was to Francis, as to S. Paul, a phrase not too daring for human lips to frame, but one of which the use had been justified by experience.

At his conversion Francis became sensible of the love of God poured out upon him for his salvation through union with Christ. But never for one moment did he conceive of that divine love as a saving power to be selfishly absorbed; he regarded himself always as an agent for its transmission to those about him. All life, human and sentient, was to him a life in God, and therefore a life in love. Its force must permeate and penetrate the world, not to transmit it would be to hinder its operation, and the hindrance would be sin. He must be in all possible ways the channel of the divine love. The first kiss of the leper, an act supremely difficult to the natural man, was a profoundly symbolic act, the first clear recognition of the oneness of all men in a brotherhood, in that Fatherhood of God which he was on the point of realizing fully.

In the converted life of Francis we see often a sublimation of natural qualities, the fresh direction of them, the widening of their scope. Good fellowship, affection, had always been characteristic of him; good fellowship had set him feasting with the youth of Assisi, sent him singing through its streets. But the kindliness for many was transmuted by his conversion into love for all. Love, for the love of God, was to be the bond of the Franciscan family, and its characteristic

activity towards those who were not of the family. Love was to seek every possible form of expression. Nothing, not even the most necessary thing, was to be withheld from him who asked for the love of God. 'Unto poor folk that begged of him he was fain to give not his goods alone but his very self, at times stripping off his garments, at times cutting or tearing them, to bestow upon them, when he had nothing else at hand.' Service of every kind; 'whereas aforetime not only the company but even the distant sight of lepers had inspired him with violent loathing, now, for the sake of Christ crucified—Who, saith the prophet, appeared despised and marred, even as a leper—and that he might fully vanquish self, he would render unto the lepers humble and kindly services in his benevolent goodness. For he would often visit their dwellings, and bestow alms on them with a bountiful hand, and with a deep impulse of pity would kiss their hands and faces.' Love sent him on his mission to the East. The Crusaders, blessed by the Church, had sought to recover the Holy Places, and to subdue and exterminate the infidel; they had failed. Francis saw that it would be a far greater thing to convert the infidel, and to give him, as a consequence of his acceptance of Christ, his right in places made holy by Christ's redemptive acts. It was a vision which transcended all the thought of Western Europe, and ran counter to its policy.

Courtesy has ever been a Franciscan quality, for Francis taught his Little Brothers that it was indeed a part of the divine love, which they must faithfully reflect. He saw in the courtesy of one who entertained him the promise of a vocation to his brotherhood,

and said to the friar who was with him, ' Know, dear Brother, that courtesy is one of the qualities of God Himself, Who, of His courtesy, giveth His sun and His rain to the just and the unjust; and courtesy is the sister of charity, the which quencheth hate and keepeth love alive.'

His love overpassed the human family, and poured itself out upon all things that have life, even upon all elements and forces of nature. The *Golden Legend* of Caxton sums that exercise of his love in saying ' He gathered the small worms out of the way because they should not be trodden with the feet of them that passed by. He commanded in winter to give honey unto bees, that they should not perish for hunger. He called all beasts his brethren. He was replenished for marvellous joy for the love of his Creator. He beheld the sun, the moon, and the stars, and summoned them to the love of their Maker.'

Many stories are told of many saints which show a marvellous power over animals, and among them Francis is chief. There are some who possess this as a natural power, to whom animals and even birds are attracted, whose sympathetic understanding enables them to have their way with animals even the fiercest or the most timid. It is possible that Francis possessed this first as a natural gift; the stories which are related in the early Franciscan writings show that in him it was sublimated, raised to an extraordinary degree.

Some of the legends are strange indeed; they need not be rejected because we find elsewhere no precise parallel, for they are well authenticated. There is that of the fierce wolf of Agobio, of whom Francis found that the city went in terror. He sought it out, rebuked

it, and so tamed it that it lived thereafter in the city as a pet. The story has been rationalized, the wolf has been explained as a ruthless robber of whom the citizens went in dread; we do not forget that even Christian knights have borne the name of Lupus. But Father Cuthbert points out that the legend has found within the last few years two strange corroborations, in the finding of a wolf's skull beneath the foundations of a chapel at Agobio which was built to commemorate the wonder, and in the discovery of a contemporary document which proves that at the time when Francis came to Agobio the district was in fact being ravaged by hungry wolves.

S. Bonaventure says that Francis 'loved with an especial warmth and tenderness those creatures that do set forth by the likeness of their nature the holy gentleness of Christ, and in the interpretation of Scripture are a type of Him,' especially lambs. The rabbit which was taken in the island in the Trasimene lake, and being given to Francis would not leave him; the leveret of Greccio which nestled in his habit; the waterfowl which would not fly away until he bade it, are instances of the trust reposed in the gentle saint by timid things. Giotto, and many a painter after him, has immortalized the story of the sermon to the birds, whom he enjoined to praise their Creator, reminding them that Christ had spoken of the Father's care for them; it is to those who were his companions that we owe that other story of the chirping birds who, at the bidding of Francis, became silent while he preached to the people of Alviano.

The fellowship which Francis claimed with all created forces and sentient life has led to his inclusion

among those who are called nature-mystics. But we must observe a distinction. Nature-mysticism, in the sense in which the term is commonly used, denotes a seeking after and finding of God in His creation, or a broadening of the conception of the Being and love of God through the contemplation of the glories of nature. But with Francis the passionate love of nature, the keen sense of the beauty of its ordered and purposeful life, were the result of his apprehension of God, and of his freedom of communion with Him. He had no need to discover God in creation, for he had found that creation was in God, that in Him all lives and moves and has its being. Brother Leo, in the *Mirror of Perfection*, says: 'He discerned perfectly the goodness of God not only in his own soul . . . but in every creature. . . . We who were with him used to see him rejoice, within and without, as it were, in all things created; so that touching or seeing them his spirit seemed to be not on earth but in heaven.' His reverence for nature was due to his perception of 'the pulsations of one life which sleeps in the stones, dreams in the plants, and wakens in man.'[1] He saw nature as the constant mirror of the divine loveliness, but he had first seen that loveliness with the eye of the soul; that which others have seen in the mirror he had seen—so far as man can see in this life—directly and immediately. 'S. Francis was the greatest of nature-mystics simply because he was not primarily a nature-mystic at all. He saw a Cross in the heavens; he felt the nails in his soul; he surrendered beauty as well as wealth in the great self-stripping. And so the fair green earth, which he had counted a world

[1] Inge: *Christian Mysticism.*

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well lost that he might win Christ, fell into his hand like a magic apple; and he possessed it as the Greek soul, intoxicated with the rhythm of passing things, had never possessed it.'[1] He saw all things living as theophanies, revelations on a lower plane of the God whom he already knew on a higher. 'The true mystic, so often taunted with a denial of the world, does but deny the narrow and artificial world of self; and finds in exchange the secrets of that mighty universe which he shares with nature and with God. Strange contacts, unknown to those who lead only the life of sense, are set up between his being and the being of all other things. In that remaking of his consciousness which follows upon the mystical awakening, the deep and primal life which he shares with all creation has been roused from its sleep. Hence the barrier between human and non-human life, which makes man stranger on earth as well as in heaven, is done away. Life now whispers to his life; all things are his intimates, and respond to his fraternal sympathy.'[2]

So the evil and pain in the world of nature, which to one who is primarily a nature-mystic present an insoluble problem, to be ignored, or evaded, or given an explanation which does not accord with the Christian conception of God, are to Francis and his spiritual kin no unintelligible sorrow, still less a stumbling-block to faith. Francis reposed upon the Pauline doctrine of the participation of creation in the experience and destiny of man; the doctrine that all creation groans and travails, waiting with man for deliverance from corruption, when the process of redemption is com-

[1] Herman: *The Nature and Value of Mysticism.*
[2] Underhill: *Mysticism.*

pletely fulfilled. Soon after Francis died there lived at King's Lynn an ancress, Margery Kempe, whose tiny treatise on Contemplation is among the classics of English mysticism. There it is said of her that 'when she saw the crucifix, or if she saw a man had a wound, or a beast, or if a man beat a child before her, or smote a horse or another beast with a whip, if she might see or hear it, she thought she saw our Lord beaten or wounded, like as she saw in the man or the beast.' We may think that Francis would have expressed in some such terms his thought about all suffering.

Nor were his sympathy and affection bounded by the realm of the animate and sentient. Flowers he loved, and would have his Little Brothers keep always a place for them in their gardens, beside the vegetables and the pot-herbs, for he saw them silently praising God by their beauty. Water was his Sister, 'useful and humble, precious and pure.' Fire was his Brother; when his clothes were singed by chance he said that Brother Fire must have his will; when the cauterizing iron was brought for that rude surgery by which they hoped to cure his blindness he prayed Brother Fire to be courteous to him, for that he loved him for their Creator's sake. Francis was ever one with the Three Children in their song, the *Benedicite*, which links all created things with men and angels in the praise of their Maker. And of all the stories which are told of his love of all living things, and of their love for him, that is entirely consonant with all our knowledge of Francis which S. Bonaventure tells, how that 'at the hour of the passing of the holy man, the larks—birds that love the light and dread the shades of twilight—flocked in

great numbers unto the roof of the house, albeit the shadows were then falling, and, wheeling round it for a long while with songs even more glad than their wont, offered their manifest and gracious witness unto the glory of the Saint, who had so often called them unto the praise of God.'

Francis regarded from the first his conversion as pledging him to a life of absolute conformity in every detail to the life of Christ Who had called him. When he had sought guidance for his life from the holy Gospels, three successive openings had shown him passages which spoke of the entire renunciation of possessions. Thenceforth poverty was his ideal, a poverty not relative but absolute, which forbade him to think of anything as his own, a poverty which he thought to be challenged and shamed when he met any one more in need than himself. It was the only way of life for him, and for those who would be his Brothers. Franciscan poverty, unlike that of some monastic orders, must be not merely individual but corporate; he forbade his friars to have in common anything more than the necessities of life for the moment.

We have already seen that in the converted life of S. Francis certain of his natural qualities were not suppressed, but sublimated and given a new direction. To strip himself of his possessions was not unnatural to him. There is no characteristic of his youth upon which the *Legend of the Three Companions* and other early writings more strongly insist than his generosity. He was most free-handed in spending, they tell us ; he ran into so great an expense upon others that he seemed no merchant's son, but rather the son of some

mighty prince. Even in those days his alms were as prodigal as his expenditure. He had made over to the poor knight of the expedition to Apulia all his own new and costly clothes, for the poverty of the knight seemed to shame Francis. In the first stage of his conversion he would give a poor man his own cap or girdle or shirt, rather than send him away unhelped. He would buy things for the adornment of churches, and send them with all secrecy to poor priests. On his first visit to S. Peter's at Rome, angered by the meanness of those who offered, he flung his purse within the grating of the altar. The impulse of careless extravagance was transmuted first into a boundless generosity to his fellows, and then into a boundless charity to those in need. The espousal of the Lady Poverty was the last stage in the ascent.

This espousal of Poverty was to Francis no limitation of life, but its complete liberation. Its spirit is set forth in a little treatise by Giovanni Parenti, written within nine months of the death of Francis, the *Sacrum Commercium*, or *Converse of Francis and his Sons with Holy Poverty*. In this allegory Francis is depicted as setting out in search of the Lady Poverty, and finding her at last on the summit of a steep and barren mountain, that queen and mistress of all virtues who had been the attendant on Christ from Bethlehem to Calvary, whom He had left on earth to seal as His those who desired to enter His kingdom. The Lady Poverty is represented as telling in a long discourse of her life in the world since the Ascension of Christ, of her companionship with the Apostles who had all things in common; of the weakening of affection for her when peace came to the Church, and Christians began to

love the world and the things that are in the world, even at last contending with one another for the possession of riches, while Poverty was compelled to take refuge with those who withdrew from the world to the religious life. The discourse goes on to show how Avarice justifies herself, by calling herself Discretion and Prudence, and by invoking the aid of Sloth, insinuating herself even among those who were called to be true Brothers of Poverty. And in the allegory Francis vows himself to her, and makes a feast for the Lady Poverty of such herbs and water as alone he and his Brothers can offer. Then—and this is the culmination of the allegory—the Lady Poverty asks to be shown their monastery. They lead her to a hill, and show her the whole world as far as they could see, saying, 'This is our monastery, Lady.' They were as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

For the right to live in such poverty as this Francis and his companions had to fight as courageously as others fought for wealth. 'Your way of life without owning anything seems to me harsh and difficult,' said the kind and sympathetic Bishop of Assisi. 'My Lord,' replied Francis, 'if we possessed property we should need arms to defend it. It is the sower of strife and suits at law, and the love of God and of one's neighbour finds many stumbling-blocks therein; therefore we desire no temporal possessions.' When Francis first went to Rome he had to persuade Pope Innocent to sanction the life of poverty in face of the opposition of all the cardinals but one. S. Clare had equally to contend for 'the privilege of most high poverty' for herself and her Sisters; successive Popes allowed, confirmed, revoked, and finally confirmed it

to them. The ideal of absolute poverty had so long been forgotten, even by monasticism, that S. Francis' venture of faith appeared as an altogether new and impossible policy.

It would be unnecessary to multiply proofs of the tenacity with which the first Franciscans held to this ideal, the rigorous discipline with which they followed it. Every early Franciscan writing abounds in stories illustrative of this following of poverty. Ownership was forbidden; even the use of such necessaries as clothing was regarded as temporary, tolerated only until the need of another appeared to be greater, whether he were a Brother or a poor man in the world. For the ownership of material things, even when it did not lead to disputes, was held to be a distraction from the things of the spirit, an abridgement of the highest liberty and freedom, a tie to that world in which the follower of Christ is a pilgrim and a stranger. Observe, nevertheless, a vital distinction between the ascetic renunciation of property by the Catharist and its renunciation by the Franciscan. The Catharist rejected material things because they were in themselves evil ; the Franciscan conceived of them still as goods, in which all were to have opportunities of sharing.

In this teaching of his Brothers lay also a main part of the message of Francis to his age. All the wars of the time, between Pope and Emperor, between city and city, between noble and burgher, were ultimately referable to the ownership of property. Only in detachment from material things, in the suppression of desire for them, could that peace be attained for which the world in its weariness longed.

Love, joy, peace, the first three fruits of the Spirit,

were notes of Franciscan life in its vernal freshness; peace founded in renunciation, joy in peace, and both in love. He would have his Little Brothers be always 'glad, and joyful, and praising God.' Here again we see the sublimation of a natural quality, to the end Francis kept something of the troubadour spirit of his youth. In the freedom that comes of self-conquest, and in the glad acceptance of everything that God sent, Francis taught that joy was assuredly to be found.

Nowhere is his teaching more clearly exhibited than in the Dialogue of Perfect Joy, recorded in the *Little Flowers*.

As Francis went one day with Brother Leo from Perugia to the Little Portion, and the bitter wind of spring grievously tormented him, he called to Brother Leo who was going on before, and said thus: 'Brother Leo, though the Friars Minor throughout all the world were great examples of holiness, and were truly edifying, nevertheless write down, and take heed diligently, that not herein is perfect joy.' And going on a little further, Francis called a second time, and said: 'O Brother Leo, though the Friars Minor should give sight to the blind, make straight the crooked, cast out devils, make the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and (greater wonder yet) should raise them to life that had been four days dead, write that not herein is perfect joy.' And going on a little, he cried aloud: 'O Brother Leo, if the Friar Minor should know all tongues, and all sciences, and all the Scriptures, so that he could prophesy and reveal not only things to come but also the secrets of consciences and souls, write that not herein is perfect joy.' And going on yet a little further, Francis called again, and

said : ' O Brother Leo, thou little sheep of God, though the Friar Minor should speak with the tongue of angels, and should know the courses of the stars and the virtues of herbs, and though all the treasures of the earth should be revealed to him, and he should understand the virtues of birds, and of fishes, and of all animals, and of men, and of trees, and of stones, and of roots, and of waters, write that not herein is perfect joy.' And going on yet further, Francis cried aloud : ' O Brother Leo, though the Friar Minor could preach so well as to turn all the infidels to the Faith of Christ, write that not herein is perfect joy.'

But when this fashion of talk had lasted two good miles, Brother Leo asked him in wonder, ' Tell me, Father, in God's Name, where then perfect joy may be found ? '

And Francis answered him in this wise : ' When we be come to S. Mary of the Angels, wet through with rain, and numbed with cold, and foul with mud, and tormented with hunger, and when we knock on the door the porter cometh angrily and saith " Who are ye ? " and we say, " We be two of your friars," and he answereth " Ye be no true men; rather, ye are two knaves that go about deceiving everybody, and stealing the alms of the poor; get ye gone "; and shuts the door upon us, and makes us stay without, in the snow and wind, cold and hungry, all night; if then we bear patiently such wrong and such cruelty and such dismissal without ever murmuring or complaining, and if we believe humbly and with charity that the porter knows us full well, and that God maketh him to speak against us; O Brother Leo, write that herein is perfect joy.

' And if we go on knocking, and he cometh out full of anger, and driveth us away as knaves, with abuse and buffeting, saying, " Go hence, ye vile thieves, get you to the almshouse, for here there shall be for you neither lodging nor food," if we suffer this with patience and gladness and love, write, Brother Leo, that herein is perfect joy.

' And if, constrained by cold and hunger, we knock yet again, and pray him that for the love of God he will let us in, and he, yet more angry, should say, " These be insolent knaves, I will pay them as they deserve," and should come upon us, and take us by our habits, and roll us in the snow, and should beat us with a heavy stick, if with gladness and patience we endure all these things, thinking upon the Passion of the blessed Christ, write, O Brother Leo, that herein is perfect joy.

' For above all the grace and the gifts that Christ giveth to His beloved is that of overcoming self, and for His love to bear willingly all pain and insult and buffetings and want. For in none other of God's gifts, save these, may we glory, seeing that they are not ours but God's. And in the cross of affliction and tribulation we may glory, for this is ours. Therefore saith the Apostle, " I will not glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." '

The dialogue exhibits the principle of the asceticism of S. Francis. It is, in fact, precisely the principle of S. Paul, who desired both to keep under his body and bring it into subjection, and to be conformed to Christ in His sufferings. S. Francis asserted his freedom of his body, his lower self, as he asserted his freedom of possessions, in order that the life of the spirit in him

might be unhindered, and that in outward circumstances he might be likened to the enduring Christ.

It has been said of S. Francis that he transformed Christian asceticism. What he did, rather, was to reassert its motive and true spirit, continually obscured by the practice and teaching of lesser souls. There may seem to be a difference in kind between his asceticism and that of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert, or of the Celtic monks, with their tremendous penances and stark austerities. We may not presume to judge such men as they, even if their actions amaze and repel us; for we cannot tell what conflicts of the spirit dictated their rigorous self-discipline; and we have to admit that from those men proceeded, in the first case, that exploration and formulation of mystical devotion by which the whole Church has profited ever since, and, in the second case, those great waves of missionary enterprise by which nations were brought under the obedience of Christ. That would surely be a spiritual insolence which presumed to judge men who stripped themselves of all that made life easy in order that they might live for Christ alone. The life which welcomes and desires sacrifice is not only a witness to spiritual values, it is a constant rebuke to our own tepid lives, our imperfect conceptions of Christian love and fortitude.

Yet the asceticism of S. Francis is at least more intelligible and attractive. If he playfully called his body Brother Ass, the patient drudge whose occasional stubbornness must be sternly combated, at least he reverenced it. He who so loved all things that God had made was under no temptation to despise the highest of created things in the world that we know,

the body which is the vehicle of the spirit. It was sufficient that Christ had taken upon Himself our flesh. No touch of Catharist heresy, no thought of the body as evil, determined any part of his ascetic practice, or dimmed the clearness of his vision. He reverenced other men's bodies, most of all those that were marred by suffering. He bade his Brothers to beware of too great abstinence, seeing that the Lord willeth mercy and not sacrifice, and to allow their bodies the necessities, that they might be strong enough to serve the needs of the spirit. He sternly forbade, as every wise guide of souls forbids, severe mortifications which might injure health. The end of all his teaching and practice about asceticism was the attainment of a perfect detachment, independence, freedom. As the body was not to be allowed to assert any right to luxuries, so it was not to be allowed by undue austerities to become so weak as to distract the spirit. Either way its attention to God would be divided. It must show itself the strong, supple instrument of the soul.

S. Bonaventure sums it when he says of Francis that ' albeit he sought with all his might to lead the Brothers into the austere life, yet the utmost rigour of severity pleased him not, such rigour as hath no compassion, nor is flavoured with the salt of discretion. . . . He taught them to follow discretion as the charioteer of the virtues, not that discretion unto which the flesh persuadeth, but that discretion which Christ taught, whose most holy life is acknowledged to be the express image of perfection.'

IV

THE EARLY FOLLOWERS OF S. FRANCIS

AS we read the story of the call that came to Francesco Bernardone and of his response to it, and compare with his self-abnegation the laxity of later Franciscanism, we may perhaps ask whether that call was not unique, peculiar to himself, rather than the indication of a way of life to which others might also be bidden. Was it really his vocation to be the father of a spiritual family; or was he intended to be a solitary herald, one crying in the wilderness, whose life was rather a portent than an example ?

The answer to that question is given in the lives of his early followers. They were men of widely varying characters and stations and aptitudes. One thing only they had in common, the conviction of a like call, the burning desire to follow Christ in the way which Francis traced for himself and for them, the will to renounce all and to associate themselves with their Father in a great adventure of faith. It has been said, lightly enough, that S. Francis was the only true Franciscan. The criticism is refuted by the early Franciscan writings. There, especially in the *Little Flowers*, we find the living portraits of men who followed Christ in complete fidelity to the ideals of Francis. We see in them one idea worked out by men of

strangely differing temperaments and qualities. They gave convincing proof that the way was possible for others, and that Francis, though gloriously pre-eminent, was not singular.

Three of the early followers of Francis are grouped together by their joint authorship of the simple chronicle of the early days known as *The Legend of the Three Companions*. Their book was written about twenty years after the death of Francis, at the bidding of Crescentius, then Minister-General of the Order. It is probable that the *Legend* has come down in an incomplete form, as a consequence of the conflict between the parties of the strict and of the modified observance, certain parts of it having been suppressed in the interest of the laxer Franciscans. But it is beyond question that so much of the document as remains is primitive, and that it was written by those who assume the authorship.

They speak of themselves as 'we who were with him'—the phrase recalls the Gospel of S. John—and their portraits have been drawn for us by Francis himself, who speaks of 'the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo, that in truth was of a most holy purity; the courtesy of Brother Angelo, that was the first soldier to come into the Order, and was fulfilled of all courtesy; and the continual and godly activity of the holy Brother Rufino, that did always pray without intermission, so that at work and even asleep his mind was always with the Lord.'

We have met with Brother Leo before; it was he who walked in the bitter weather with Father Francis, and heard from him that wonderful discourse concerning perfect joy, and where it may be found. It was

he who is related in the *Little Flowers* to have been with Francis in a place where they had no books to say the divine office, with whom Francis devised an exercise of self-accusation, in which Brother Leo could not play the part assigned to him, but answered to all the reproaches which Francis heaped upon himself in the contrary sense, saying that God made him speak as it pleased Him, and not as it pleased Francis. He was among the little company of five or six who, when the shadows were gathering, climbed with Francis the Mount of Alverna, and waited with him for the fulfilling of the will of God. There Brother Leo received the reward of that simplicity which had led Francis to address him so often as *pecorello di Dio*, little sheep of God. For the Brother was assailed by a strong temptation of the spirit, and desired in his simplicity that Francis would write for him some devout sentence with his own hand; for he thought that if he had it the temptation would leave him, wholly or in part. And though he dared not speak of it himself to Francis, the Father read his mind, and with his own hand wrote the praises of Christ, and signed the writing with the Tau cross, and gave it to Leo, saying: 'Take this, dear Brother, and keep it diligently until thy death. May God bless thee, and keep thee against all temptation. Be not downcast because thou hast temptations; for at such times I deem thee a friend and a better servant of God, and the more thou art assailed by temptations, the better I love thee. Verily I say unto thee that no man should deem himself a true friend of God, save in so far as he hath passed through many temptations and tribulations.' Brother Leo was greatly cheered; and the paper which Francis gave him was so carefully kept

that it may be seen at Assisi to this day. It was Brother Leo who, when they came to the top of the mountain, and Francis had withdrawn to a little cell to keep his fast apart from the others, was bidden to bring him every day a little bread and water, and who saw him there rapt in contemplation, oblivious of bodily needs, and heard Francis tell of the two revelations that had then come to him, the knowledge and understanding of himself, and the knowledge and understanding of God. It was Brother Leo who bandaged the wounds of the stigmata, that others might not know of the wonder which Francis concealed, and thereafter attended him until the end, writing down with his own hand the Song of the Creatures.

Beyond all others, save S. Clare, Brother Leo was of spiritual kin to Francis. A simple, winning soul, utterly loyal to Francis, who trusted him implicitly and would have him always at his side. That loyalty brought him great sadness after Francis' death, when Brother Elias ruled the Order and was greatly changing its character. He could not bear that the apostle of poverty should be commemorated by the great church of S. Francesco which Elias was raising in his honour, and he broke in pieces the marble vase which had been placed on the site for the reception of offerings. Elias had Brother Leo scourged, and banished him from Assisi. We do not know what then became of him for a few years. There were those in remote hermitages, such as Francis had taught the Brothers to love, who kept the precepts of their founder in solitude, awaiting the day when they would again be reasserted in the Order. And for Brother Leo there was always a welcome at S. Damian's, where Clare and the Poor

Ladies of her convent were unaffected by the divisions in the First Order, and espoused poverty as Francis had done. There Brother Leo left all that he wrote, with such relics of Francis as the breviary which he had used; and he was there, with Brother Angelo, when Clare died. Gentler times came; Brother Elias went forth into the darkness, like another Judas, and Brother Leo lived again at the Little Portion, more and more venerated as the years passed as being an intimate of the founder, lingering to old age, like another S. John, to tell of the wonderful life that had been lived among them. He survived Francis for forty-five years, and was buried near him in S. Francesco. It is quite certain that we owe to him the most valuable part of the record of the early days.

It is at least possible that Brother Leo was already a priest when he joined the Order. Brother Angelo was certainly a knight, and of noble family. A late, but credible story, tells how Francis met him as he was travelling to Rome, and said : ' Angelo, it is now a long time since you put on your sword and your armour ; now in place of the sword take the Cross of Christ, follow me, and I will make you a knight of Christ.' Francis had known knights and their ways, the laws and songs of chivalry, the stir of the camp, the clash of arms. Now that he followed another kind of warfare it pleased his humour to detach a knight from the battles of the world, and to set him to fight the battles of God. Angelo was loyal to his new leader, and entered at once the innermost circle. It is to his recollections that we owe some of the most familiar stories of Francis; how, for example, the Father went with Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo towards

Bevagno, and saw many birds sitting in trees by the roadside, and going alone into a field called the birds to him, and preached to them of the love of God for all things created, and how they should sing the praises of God, and at last gave them his blessing and leave to fly away.

He too was on Mount Alverna. With Brother Leo, as the saint lay dying, he sang to him his own Song of the Creatures. 'When those two Brothers came before him, filled with sorrow and grief, they sang to him with many tears that song of Brother Sun and of the other creatures of the Lord which the saint had made. And then before the last verse Francis added some verses concerning Sister Death.' He too lived long with Brother Leo at the Little Portion, and was with him at Clare's death-bed, and lies with him in S. Francesco. Of him, as of another knight whom Francis added to his company, Francis might have said: 'Of a truth this courteous gentleman would be good for our Order and our company, who is so grateful and bounden unto God, and so loving and courteous to his neighbour and to the poor. Know, dear Brother, that courtesy is one of the qualities of God Himself, Who, of His courtesy, giveth His sun and His rain to the just and the unjust; and courtesy is the sister of charity, the which quencheth hate and keepeth love alive.'

Save in devotion, the third of the Three Companions was very unlike the other two. Rufino was of the noble family of the Scifi, therefore akin to Clare. Yet he had had no experience of the world, he seemed predestined for the cloister, and came young into the family of Francis. From him the renunciation of the

world seemed to demand no effort, for he had never been entangled with it. It is related in the *Little Flowers* that once Francis was speaking with certain Brethren when Rufino came out of a wood in which he had been praying, and passed near them. Then Francis, looking earnestly upon him, said to the Brothers, 'Whom think ye to be the holiest soul that God hath in the world?' And they said to Francis that they thought himself. But Francis said, 'Brothers most dear to me, I am of myself the most unworthy wretch that God hath in this world; but mark ye Brother Rufino. God hath shown me that he is one of the three most holy souls in all the world; and in truth I tell you that I doubt not to call him Saint Rufino even in his lifetime, since his soul is so strengthened with grace, and sanctified by our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Yet the following of Christ in the Order was not at all easy to Rufino. He longed to spend his days in contemplation in some hermitage; but he had to serve actively as the other Brothers. He disliked preaching, but he had to take his share in it, sometimes in humiliating conditions which Francis imposed upon him in order to test his obedience. He had not quite that gaiety of heart which others had, and perhaps their lightness was often burdensome to him. Shy, diffident, and of noble birth, there must often have been occasions when his spirit was tried in the common life. Yet he bravely persevered. He too was on Mount Alverna, and with Francis at the last; he lived with Brother Leo at the Little Portion, two old men waiting together for death. The Church has set no halo about his head, in spite of the prophecy of Francis, and that too is perhaps what his humility would have wished.

It is, again, an altogether different type that we see in Brother Masseo, a man of sturdier mind and body, less apt to pay deference to Francis, though he reverenced him, and therefore beloved of Francis for his simple ease. And yet a man of the deepest devotion, and a great seeker after humility, unaware at first that he could not attain it of his own striving, but that it was a free grace of God. Having received this grace, he was thenceforth always joyful and glad, with a cheerful countenance and a merry heart. Francis tested that humility more than once, in ways which would have put to shame any but the sincerely humble. Brother Masseo was a man of education, of fine presence, courteous, ready in conversation, one who easily stood well with his neighbours, and even with casual acquaintances and strangers.

There is a hint of this in one of the most beautiful stories in the *Little Flowers*, doubtless recorded by Brother Masseo himself. Francis went once with Brother Masseo as his companion towards France, on a journey from which he was recalled before he reached its end. As they went they begged their bread for the love of God, one taking one street of a town, one another. When they met outside the town, in a place where there was a fountain of water, and hard by it a broad stone, they set out the provisions which had been given them. And because Francis was mean to look upon, and small of stature, he had got by his begging naught save a few mouthfuls of bread, and those but dry scraps. But to Masseo had been given good pieces in plenty, because he was tall and comely. And Francis, seeing that Masseo's pieces of bread were more in number, and larger than his own and better,

rejoiced with great joy, and said, ' O Brother Masseo, we are not worthy of so vast a treasure.' But Masseo answered, ' Father, how can one speak of treasure where is such poverty and lack of all things whereof we have need ? Here is no cloth, or knife, or porringer, or house, or serving-man or maid.' And Francis answered, ' It is precisely this that I account great treasure, wherein is nothing at all prepared by human hands, but whatsoever we have is given by God's own providence, as appeareth clearly in the bread that we have begged, in this fair table of stone, and in this bright spring. Wherefore I will that we pray unto God that He make us to love with all our heart the treasure of holy poverty, which is so noble that God Himself did become a servitor of it.'

Francis saw how difficult the practice of humility was to Brother Masseo, and gave him many obediences by which he might be exercised in it. He said to Masseo one day, before all the Brethren, ' O Brother Masseo, all these thy Brothers have the grace of contemplation and prayer; but thou hast the grace of preaching the Word of God for the edifying of the people. Wherefore, in order that thy Brothers may be able to give themselves up to contemplation, I will that thou be porter and almoner, and have the care of the kitchen; and when the other Brothers eat, thou shalt eat outside the door of the house, so that whoever come to the house thou mayest satisfy them, before they knock, with some good word of God. And then no other need go out but thou; and this do for the sake of holy obedience.' Brother Masseo accepted without a word the humblest of offices, of which the assignment seemed to set him on a lower level of spirituality than

the others. Even when the others became uneasy, considering that Brother Masseo was indeed a man of great perfection, as good and better than they, and that upon him was laid all the burden of the house, and they came to Francis and asked him that Brother Masseo's humble offices might be shared among them, Brother Masseo said with great humility, 'Father, whatever thou dost lay upon me, I deem it altogether done of God.' Then Francis, seeing both the loving-kindness of the Brothers and the humility of Brother Masseo, spoke to them wonderful words concerning humbleness of heart; how that the greater the gifts and the graces that God giveth us, the more humble should we be, since without humility no virtue is acceptable unto God. Then he did as the Brothers had asked, and distributed the offices among them.

Brother Masseo was with Francis on Mount Alverna, and to him we owe a moving account of the departure from the mountain after the vision. He tells us how Francis was compelled to ride, because he could not set his feet to the ground for the pain of the wounds; how he bade them have always a love for the mountain, and to watch and pray there, sending God-fearing Brothers to serve God in that place; and how he bade it farewell, since he was going to the Little Portion to die. 'I, Brother Masseo, have written this with tears,' the simple chronicle ends. 'The blessing of God be upon us.'

He too lived long after Francis, possibly the longest of all who had been with him. We cannot doubt that his gift of preaching, his personal attractiveness, his shrewd and pithy sayings, had helped many to set their feet in the way in which he walked so simply, and with so sure a faith.

Bernard of Quintavalle was the first to walk with Francis in the new way of life; a way as strange to Bernard as to Francis, for he had been among the noblest and wisest in Assisi, as the *Little Flowers* tell us; a man, therefore, somewhat older than Francis, and like him of wealthy family. He had known Francis in the days when he was a leader of Assisian revels; he had watched him now for two years, despising all that he had loved before, bearing all the ridicule that his old companions heaped upon him; and Bernard asked himself as time went on whether this man, so strangely altered, had not some special call and grace of God.

Bernard put the matter to the test. He asked Francis one evening to dine and lodge with him, and made ready for him a bed in his own room, where a lamp burned through the night. Both lay down, and both pretended to sleep. But soon Francis arose, and set himself to night-long prayer, repeating continually 'My God and my All!' and entreating God that He would enable him to work in the world for Him. Bernard noted all, and in the morning he said, 'Brother Francis, I am wholly purposed in my heart to leave the world, and to follow thee in whatsoever thou mayest bid me.' Whereat Francis rejoiced, and said to Bernard that they would hear Mass at the bishop's house, and after that pray until the time of Terce, and then open the missal thrice, that God might reveal His will to them. It was the old method of the *sortes*; practised long before Christianity, taken over as a popular custom by Christians using the Holy Scriptures, and still sometimes used by country folk of simple faith. The Gospel opened at the passage which tells of selling

possessions, and of following the Lord in freedom. Bernard went out, sold all that he had—and he was very rich—gave all his money to widows and orphans, monasteries and hospices, prisoners and pilgrims, and made himself in poverty the equal of Francis. So Francis said in after time that Bernard was the founder of the Order, inasmuch as he had been the first to leave the world, keeping back naught for himself, but offering himself naked in the arms of the Crucified.

Bernard had not long been with Francis when the Father sent him on a mission to Bologna. There he was mocked for his threadbare habit by the children of the place—Bernard the rich magistrate of a few weeks before. They plucked at his hood, pelted him with dust and stones. But day after day Bernard returned to the market-place to suffer the same usage, always cheerful and uncomplaining; until a certain judge of that city began to think that this surely must be some holy man, and asked him, 'Who art thou, and why hast thou come hither?' Brother Bernard gave him, in answer, the Rule of Francis to read; and the judge was so moved by its literal simplicity that he took Brother Bernard to lodge with him, and in a short time gave him a house to dwell in, so that Bernard was able to return to Assisi and tell Francis that a house had been founded in Bologna which he might send Brothers to serve.

Those days of early hardship were in both their minds when Francis, blind and weak, sent for Bernard and blessed him, as his first-born in Christ. 'Write,' said Francis to the Brother beside him, probably Brother Leo, 'Write what I shall say to thee. The first Brother that God gave me was Brother Bernard, who first

began with me and fulfilled completely the perfection of the Gospel, distributing to the poor all his goods. For that, and for many other reasons, I am more bound to love him than any other Brother of the Order. Therefore I will, and I order as I can, that whoever be Minister-General shall love and honour him as he would me. Let the Ministers and all the Brothers of the Order look on him as they would look on me.'

Brother Bernard continued to live in a simplicity which rebuked the growing ease of the Order under Brother Elias; he died in a peace which made those about him marvel; and when his spirit had passed, the *Mirror of Perfection* says, 'he did seem verily a saint that smiled.'

Of all the early accessions to the Order that of Clare was the most notable, and of the gifts of personality which it received hers was among the greatest. We have seen Clare before, at that moment when she made at the Little Portion her espousal of poverty, welcomed into the fellowship of Francis in the glow of the midnight torches before the altar of their tiny chapel.

Her relation with the Brothers of the First Order was of the most innocent simplicity. Father Cuthbert, in his *Life of S. Francis*, has well said that Francis and Clare 'both loved the Christ in His earthly poverty and in His pity for the world; and in this revelation of the Christ-life they both found the full response to their own desire. And in this they became as children of one birth; such an entire sympathy did it create between them, and so intuitive an understanding did it give them of each other.'

Her sacrifice was the greater, because the more

difficult to achieve. A man might do as he willed; the world of the Middle Ages, even more than that which had preceded it, was dominated by man's will, and ordered for his pleasure and convenience. A family such as that of which Clare came controlled absolutely the lives of its womenfolk, their marriages, their vocations, in its own interest. The daughters of a great house were regarded as an asset to be employed profitably in the strengthening of its position by alliances with other houses. And though Clare had been permitted some measure of liberty, limits were set to it which her family had no thought that she could possibly overstep. So far she had used her liberty in the service of the poor, serving in such ways as were thought proper to her station. But the daughter of a knightly family had inherited a masculine independence and strength of will. Her education had made her appreciative of learning, if not herself learned; she loved the beauty of flowers even as Francis himself; she was proficient in the arts of music and of fine needlework. Yet when the vocation to a life of poverty came to her, she had no hesitation in fulfilling it.

It is more easy for us to understand her renunciation than her fortitude in following an untried way. The convents of the established Orders, especially the Benedictine, were as second homes to the daughters of noble houses, to which the nuns were continually indebted for alms and protection. But this new way which Francis followed was so far from being established in the eyes of the world that it had not yet come to stability within itself. It was a way of life as yet unproved by the Brothers; it seemed hardly conceivable that women could walk in it. It was the response, as

yet unformulated, to a generous impulse of love, showing itself in every way of self-abnegation. Clare felt the impulse, and trusted God that He would direct her through Francis.

So, as we have seen, she made her profession of poverty, and came through much opposition to the guardianship of the house of S. Damian. There she and the Sisters whom God gave her served Him in the entire poverty for which she soon gained the sanction of the Roman Pontiff.

Clare's Rule for the Poor Ladies was not founded in the first instance upon a formulation, but on an inspiration. That which Francis had given her remained her abiding possession; in the days when his own courage faltered Clare rekindled from the lamp of devotion which he had lit within her the flame which for a time had flickered and grown dim in the tempest which broke upon him.

Clare hardly ever left S. Damian's, when she had formed her company of Poor Ladies. But there was one memorable occasion, of which the narrative is kept in the *Little Flowers*. Francis had often visited S. Damian's, and given the Sisters there instruction and counsel. And Clare, longing exceedingly to break bread with him once, in a kind of sacramental meal, besought this of him; but he was never willing, until his Brothers said that this refusal did not seem to them to accord with holy charity. Francis thereupon replied, 'If it be good to you, it seems good to me also. But for her greater consolation I will that this breaking of bread be at S. Mary of the Angels, for she has so long been enclosed in S. Damian's that it will gladden her to see again the chapel of S. Mary, where

she became the spouse of Christ; and there let us eat together in the Name of God.' So Clare, attended by one of her Sisters, came to the Little Portion, and made her prayer in the church where she had given herself to God. Then she came to the house of the Friars, and sat with her companion and S. Francis and all the Brothers. There, as they sat at meat, Francis began to speak of God so sweetly and so wondrously that they were all rapt in God. The legend says that men of Assisi, looking down towards the Little Portion, saw so bright a light about the place that they ran thither, thinking it to be on fire; but they found no fire at all, only Francis and Clare and all their company sitting in silent contemplation. They took it for a sign that God had enkindled the fire of divine love in the hearts of the Brothers and the Poor Ladies.

It was Clare who encouraged Francis to continue his mission of preaching to the people when he himself doubted whether he ought not to withdraw wholly to the contemplative life; and in many other ways, and at many critical moments, she upbore him by her counsel and her prayer ; even to the end of his life, when in blindness and desolation, he turned to S. Damian's as to a stronghold of the first spirit of his teaching.

Many lovely legends have gathered about the memory of Clare. But of a life hidden in the convent few actions can be recorded. That story, however, is without doubt true which tells of her courage when Assisi was threatened by the army of the Emperor Frederick II, and the rough soldiers penetrated even within the enclosure of S. Damian's. Clare rose from her sick-bed, and taking the ciborium from the oratory

which adjoined her cell, faced the invaders at an upper window. At the sight the soldiers fell back, and left the convent unharmed.

She lived for nearly thirty years after the passing of Francis, a continual support of those who kept the primitive observance, brave and cheerful to the last in spite of growing infirmity. Three of the early companions of Francis, as we have seen, ministered to her as she lay dying, and read to her, as they had also read to their Father in his last moments, the Passion of our Lord from the Gospel of S. John.

Clare had brought to the fraternity a new element of strength. And from the convent of S. Damian, as Father Cuthbert says, purity radiated over the whole countryside. 'For that, more than for aught else, Clare was loved, because in an age which sang of chivalry she gave to the world a vision of pure women, strong in faith and fearless in loyalty.'

Brother Giles stands out in the early Franciscan writings in the clearest of portraiture. A man strong of mind and will, body and speech; and of all the early followers of Francis the one who attained most to contemplation.

Francis had only just entered on the path of renunciation when Giles begged that he too might walk in it. As they went to Assisi to get cloth for his habit, a poor woman asked alms of them for the love of God, and Giles was bidden to give her his own rich mantle. It was a test to which he responded without hesitation. He went with Francis on one of the early missions, bidding the people listen to what Francis said, himself as yet keeping silence. Then the desire of pilgrimage seized upon him; he wandered East and West to the

great shrines of Christendom, to S. James of Compostella, to the Holy Sepulchre itself. Everywhere he lived by the labour of his hands, not begging his bread as many a sturdy beggar then did on the plea of pilgrimage, but carrying water, making baskets, treading the winepress, burying the dead. There came a time when the lust of far travel died down, and he went only about the cities of Umbria. In those solitary wanderings his spiritual power had developed, and he converted many by his wise and practical counsels, and still more by the example of his life.

Austere to the end, he scorned the relaxations which the weaker Brothers began to allow themselves. The hut of wattle, the one habit, the one meal a day, sufficed him at the end of his life as they had at the beginning. Work and prayer filled his days. Not that he was insensible to the tenderer things in life: he loved flowers as passionately as Father Francis had done, so that men said that flowers sprang from the earth at his bidding; he had all the Father's love for the natural beauty of the earth; and he silenced with his music tedious disputations. If he seemed sometimes severe towards others who were self-indulgent, he was far more severe towards himself; he was full of the sweetest charity, and of tenderness towards those who suffered or mourned.

As the years went on his life became more and more hidden with Christ in God, passing into that life of contemplation which our age finds it so difficult to understand. The man so strong of mind and body, so indefatigable in toil and so sane in counsel, lost control over his own comings and goings between the worlds of sense and of vision. He hovered always on the

confines of ecstasy; like S. Paul he was caught up into the third heaven, and heard words unspeakable, saw things of which he could not tell, seeing a naked glory. He came at last to say, 'I do not believe, I know. I *know* One God, the Father Almighty.'

His Brothers understood of Giles, as they had understood of Brother Francis, that his real self dwelt habitually in the land of far distances. They knew whither he was gone, when he was present in the body but absent in the spirit. Other mystics recognized in him a kindred soul. S. Louis of France, on his way to the Crusade, visited Brother Giles in the Friary of Perugia. The two saints embraced again and again, but no word passed between them. 'That was the King of France,' they said to Brother Giles, 'and you spake no word to him!' 'Our spirits spoke,' replied Giles; 'they understood each other as friends.' It may help us to understand better the nature of mysticism when we remember that the first great contemplative of the Franciscan Order was also, and pre-eminently, the untiring manual worker, and the man of shrewd, robust common sense, whose sayings, collected in eighteen chapters of the *Little Flowers*, are as simple and direct as Christian teaching can possibly be.

As if to remind us that the highest revelation is made not to the wise and prudent of the world, nor only to the wise in the Church, but to babes, we find contemporary with the judicious Brother Giles the childlike, almost childish, Brother Juniper. Perhaps of all the early Franciscans his is the character least intelligible to the modern Northern mind. He is 'the excellent jester of the Lord,' God's fool, whose sim-

plicity in worldly matters is almost that of the simpleton, who is the butt of his companions' kindly wit, and, for his innocence, their despair. Yet they reverenced and loved him, and in the *Little Flowers* he and Brother Giles are the only friars singled out for the honour of separate sections in which their words and acts are recorded. Story after story is told of his stark literalness, his engaging simplicity; repented with tears when he realized too late that by it his Brothers had been put to inconvenience. There was no humiliation that he would not undertake that he might become as a fool for Christ's sake, nothing with which he would not part in the name of charity. Bidden under holy obedience not to give away habit after habit to the poor, he tells the next beggar whom he meets to take the habit off his back, since he may not strip himself. 'For this reason,' says the *Little Flowers*, 'the Brothers left nothing lying about, for that Brother Juniper gave away everything for the love of God and for His glory.' Not even the little silver bells which fringed the altar frontal were safe from his charitable hands; there was no rebuke for his heedlessness that he did not instantly disarm by his pathetic self-reproaches, and his devising of yet new charities. And he too was rapt out of himself with devotion, so great a fire of love burned within him.

Those whom we have so far considered were wholehearted followers of Francis. Differing widely in rank, in age, in natural gifts, they were one in their loyal following of their Father in the family of Christ. But of that company was one who in many respects differed from them all, and in this most, that his personal love of Francis did not avail to keep him loyal

to the Franciscan ideal, or to subdue the ambition which was his ruin.

Brother Elias, who built above the body of the saint the glorious church of S. Francesco, loved Francis with an affection deep and true. But he led the Order from the path which Francis had traced for it, he dominated it by a masterful will, he was at last excommunicated by the Church. A strange, inscrutable, sinister figure, whose tragedy was that he ever became a Franciscan.

Elias was of a craftsman's family, and was of equal age with Francis. It is possible, as Sabatier suggests, that he was the companion of Francis in the early stages of his conversion, when, turning from revelry, he began to pray in a solitary place with one who kept watch at the entrance to the little cave. Yet Elias was not among the first to join the Order; at the time when the Brothers were beginning to gather at the Little Portion he was making his studies at Bologna. His learning stood him in good stead when at last he became a Franciscan, and he was sent on a mission to Tuscany, among men of nimble wit. Zeal was his, and courage; he went to the Holy Land, and became Minister-Provincial of Syria, attracting to the Order men of real holiness. It was in Syria that he first became conscious of his power. He returned from the Holy Land to find divisions in the Order. His power of winning men's confidence and attaching them to his person gained for him the leadership of the section opposed to strictness; and when at the Chapter of 1221 Francis reaffirmed the primitive Rule, Brother Elias quietly assumed the administration of the Order, and worked incessantly for its mitigation.

Thenceforward Francis was of less account than the

busy administrator, upon whom, in effect, all observance of the Rule depended, and who could, without any open defiance of Francis, gently modify the customs of the common life. Against the strong, shrewd, managing Brother Elias the now ailing Francis was no effective force. When the Founder died, Brother Elias proceeded against the maintainers of the primitive spirit with a cruel vengeance, even scourging and imprisoning. He himself lived as a powerful lord, in a household of great splendour, with many servants, and in self-indulgence. He was deposed from office as the result of an appeal to the Pope. Thereupon he transferred his allegiance and his abilities to the cause of the excommunicated Emperor Frederick, and was himself excommunicated, and expelled from the Order. He lived in contumacy until the death of the Emperor; then, as his own death approached, he was reconciled to the Church, though not readmitted to the Order.

His is a life which clearly exemplifies the strange inconsistencies of human nature when it is not unified and controlled by a real devotion. Love for Francis was indubitably strong in Brother Elias; mingled with some compassion for the shabby little enthusiast who did not care to make his Order efficient and glorious, a controlling force in the affairs of the Church. Even in the days when he was working against the ideals of the Founder, Elias was constantly with him, tending him with affectionate care, winning from him a death-bed benediction. None can doubt the sincerity of that letter in which Brother Elias announced to the Brothers the death of their Father; and yet he hunted down ruthlessly those who kept the Father's Rule in the Father's spirit. Himself never truly espoused to

the Lady Poverty, he came to think the primitive Rule visionary and unpractical. He could not fling away ambition, and he died in the bitterness of failure.

Yet to this man, such were the qualities which ambition obscured, good men as well as great were strangely attracted; and to the end he seems somehow to have retained the confidence of Clare and her Poor Ladies, who were at the same time the encouragement of those who kept the primitive spirit under Elias' persecution. And one thing at least we owe to Brother Elias, that church which is not only the glory of Assisi, but also 'the cradle of the Renaissance, the first and the fairest flower of Italian Gothic.'

Those who have so far been mentioned were men and women included in the First and Second Franciscan Orders, men of the Friars Minor, women of the Poor Ladies. There was a third society, that of the Franciscan Tertiaries, men and women who remained in the world, who followed in ways appropriate to their station the impulse of the Franciscan spirit, and were closely affiliated to the First and Second Orders.

In the foundation of the Third Order, if that can be termed a foundation which sprang up spontaneously, and gradually found its method of life, Franciscanism developed no new idea. Every religious society tends naturally to gather about itself a company of men and women whom circumstances, as for example marriage, compel to live still in the world, but who desire the support of association with those whose dedication is complete; who accept their direction in spiritual matters; who are united with them in prayer, in a modified but similar rule of life, and in other benefits which come from spiritual kinship. Such, to take one

example, are the oblates and associates of the Benedictine Order.

By far the greater number of those who were moved by the preaching of Francis were unable to join his brotherhood. Nor did he in the least expect or desire that all men should leave the world as a consequence of their conversion to Christ. None recognizes more clearly than the wise religious that the gates of the celestial city are many, and many the paths that lead to them, and that God's one purpose for man is fulfilled in many ways. Francis welcomed, therefore, the fellowship of those who could not become of his innermost circle, and who must needs serve God in the world. To them, as to his Little Brothers, he gave at first a precept rather than a formulated rule of life. The 'Letter to all Christians' which he wrote early in his apostolate called all men to a closer following of Christ. It insisted upon the due use of the sacraments, upon the exercise of charity and humility, upon fasting and the giving of alms, upon mutual regard and forbearance, upon simplicity, humility, and purity of life. The Letter is instinct with the very spirit of the Gospels, of which actual phrases are deftly woven into it, in the manner so characteristic of Francis. It had the result of associating closely to the Order, and to one another, those whom his preaching moved to repentance.

It was natural that a further formulation of rule should follow, approved by authority, dealing with external conduct, and enjoining a more detailed observance upon those who entered this fraternity of penitence. The movement took shape as a definite protest against the luxury of the time, and against the quarrel-

someness which spoiled all life; it operated as a check upon the continual petty warfare which devastated the Italian cities. Those who joined the fraternity became members of a religious corporation, and could not be compelled to take up arms at the command of the secular power. The Franciscan Tertiaries, in fact, gave the deathblow to the feudal system.

At first the Tertiaries were men and women living in the world. In later days it became usual for those who were free to order their own lives to form themselves into communities, following a common life in a rule less rigorous than that of the First and Second Orders; the Tertiaries became divided into Regular and Secular.

The Franciscan Tertiaries included many of the very greatest men and women of the Middle Ages. S. Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary; S. Louis, King of France; S. Ferdinand, King of Castile, were proofs that the royal robe might cover a true poverty of spirit. Dante and Petrarch and Giotto so consecrated their arts that they were made to appear clearly as ways of God's manifestation of Himself among men. Columbus and Vasco da Gama showed that courage and the spirit of adventure were congruous with the gentler Christian virtues.

Greatest of all Franciscan Tertiaries in the eyes of the world is Dante, great also the debt which the lovers of Francis owe to him. His actual relation to the Order is not quite certain. A legend of a generation after Dante's death sets him for a time among the novices of the First Order, in which he did not proceed to profession. In the Order itself the tradition is that he was never more than a Tertiary. For the Founder

of the Friars Minor he had the greatest reverence. Himself penetrated with a sense of the corruption of the world and of the Church, burning with ardour for the reformation and renewal of the world through a more faithful Church, he revered S. Francis as the pattern of the moral and spiritual reformer. In the twelfth canto of the *Paradiso* he shows S. Francis as the spouse of that Poverty who since ' with Christ she mounted on the Cross ' had been despised among men until Francis became her lover, with ' concord and glad looks, wonder and love.' Dante says that Francis at his death—

> to his Brotherhood
> As their just heritage, had given in charge
> His dearest lady, and enjoined their love
> And faith to her.

He makes the Dominican S. Thomas Aquinas, who sings the praise of S. Francis as the Franciscan S. Bonaventure sings in turn the praise of S. Dominic, speak of S. Francis as—

> one who were a fit colleague
> To keep the bark of Peter, in deep sea,
> Helmed to right point.

But Dante had been born a full generation after S. Francis died, a generation which had seen his Order torn by divisions about the keeping of its Rule, and the acceptance of mitigations. In Dante's time Franciscans no longer went on their mission with the old joyousness, else were his lines unintelligible—

> In silence and in solitude we went,
> One first, the other following his steps,
> As Friars Minor journeying on their road.

It is not to the Franciscans of his own time but to S. Francis himself that the admiration and love of

Dante are given. By him the enrolment as a Tertiary was valued rather as offering a direction of personal life than as a knitting into spiritual fellowship with those who formed the Franciscan brotherhood of the age. And beyond doubt that rule moulded the conduct of Dante, and its following brought to him, amid all his sadness, if not joy, at least some degree of security and of consolation.

The Regular Tertiaries may seem to occupy an anomalous place in the Franciscan family, neither accepting the complete self-abnegation of the First and Second Orders, nor serving God in the world as exemplary layfolk. But the institution was a response to an early impulse, and it took shape very soon after the death of S. Francis, perhaps as a result of meetings held for devotion in the houses of the early Tertiaries.

The institution justified itself, mainly by its activity in good works. Within a century it had produced two great saints, of differing types. S. Margaret of Cortona was a penitent who established a hospital and a nursing sisterhood in her native town, in reparation for the sin of her early life, and who became a great influence for peace in the civic quarrels of her time.

Blessed Angela of Foligno was another penitent, the fruit of whose retirement from the world was the *Book of Divine Consolation* which is one of the great treatises of mystical literature. It is the Blessed Angela who was chosen by Mrs. Herman as the representative mystic in her great work on *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, in which the life of Angela is the subject of a detailed study. In her is seen the balance of institutionalism and mysticism, the combination of the active and the passive, the tender and the austere; and one

of her biographers has termed her the Mistress of Theologians, since all her doctrine is drawn from a living Book, the Lord Himself, Who had so strangely summoned her to follow Him in the narrow but joyous way of the Franciscan life.

V

THE COMING OF THE GREYFRIARS TO ENGLAND

ONLY seventeen years separated the formation of the company of S. Francis at S. Mary of the Angels from the death of their Father. Within those years they had penetrated to France, Spain, Germany, Morocco, Syria, and England. Perhaps no single fact witnesses more eloquently to the fervour of the primitive Franciscan family, their conviction that they had a mission to declare afresh the message of the love of God.

The story of the first coming of Greyfriars to England is told in detail by Thomas of Eccleston, who wrote while memories of it were still fresh.

The little company landed at Dover on September 10, 1224, a few days before that vision of Francis on Mount Alverna which signed him as a follower of the Crucified. They were nine in number, four clerics and five laymen. Brother Agnellus of Pisa had been designated Minister-Provincial of England at the last Chapter of the Order. He was about thirty years of age, in deacon's orders, and had already been Guardian of the Friars in the Paris house, greatly commending himself in that office both to his brethren and to seculars. Brother Richard of Ingworth was an English-

man, rather older than Brother Agnellus, a priest and a preacher. The third, Richard of Devon, was yet young, and in minor orders. The fourth also was an Englishman, Brother William of Esseby. Of the laymen, Brother Henry was a Lombard. Brother Lawrence was of Beauvais, a close friend of Francis, who as he lay dying gave to Lawrence his own tunic, ' with a most sweet blessing.' Brother William was a Florentine. Of the two others, Melioratus and James, we have no particulars.

The monks of the Abbey of Fécamp in Normandy had paid the passage of the nine to England, and had provided them with food for the journey; it is yet another instance of the charity of the Benedictines to the early Franciscans. From Dover, after the experience of being locked up as suspect vagabonds, they went to Canterbury, where they stayed for two days in the Priory of the Holy Trinity, and then divided into two companies, one remaining in Canterbury, the other going forward to London. The Canterbury Friars were given the use of a small room below a school, where they sat as if imprisoned until the scholars went home, and then made themselves a fire in the school, warming their poor drink of the dregs of beer mixed with water, and eating what scraps of food they had, ' with joy and gladness, and interchange of edifying converse.'

The four who went on to London found there a temporary lodging with the Dominican Friars, who had come to England three years earlier. After a week or two they hired a plot of land on Cornhill, where they made for themselves rude huts of wattle, stuffing the interstices with dried grass, a poor protection against

the bleak winds of early winter. By the following summer their place in London was assured, their mission was understood, and a house was given to the Corporation of London for their use.

Those who stayed in Canterbury were also soon established. The Master of the Priests' Hospital assigned to them a small plot of ground in what is now the heart of the city, and there they stayed for half a century, until a devout citizen built for them the friary of which a most picturesque part still remains, carried on two arches above the little arm of the river Stour.

Other towns were soon occupied. They did not fear to divide their small forces in order to cover more ground, for wherever they went they found others who eagerly desired to take the habit. Two of the London company went on to Oxford, there again finding their first shelter under the roof of the Dominicans, but soon coming to a lodging of their own in the parish of S. Ebbe's, near the river. And there, as Thomas of Eccleston says, the Lord sowed a grain of mustard which became a tree greater than all; many bachelors of arts and nobles flocked to them; it was not long before the Friars were sharing, and then directing, the studies of the University. Friaries at Northampton, Cambridge, and Lincoln followed; within six years the Greyfriars had sixteen houses in England. They were soon to become a Province everywhere recognized as of singular glory to the whole Order.

All their first settlements were poor and mean, and often unwholesome. In London they dwelt in a place which even among the foul alleys of a mediaeval town was notable for its foulness, even though one or two great houses were found in it, and was called Stinking

Lane. At Oxford their settlement by the sluggish river was narrow and damp. At Cambridge the burgesses assigned to them the use of an old synagogue, or Jew's house, next to the gaol, which they were able afterwards to add to the first house. At Shrewsbury the King gave them a piece of land; the citizens built them a dormitory of stone, but the Minister, moved by zeal for poverty, ordered it to be taken down, and walls of mud to be substituted. Despite the resistance of the citizens, the stone cloister at Southampton was destroyed by an offended Guardian, who saw in it a slighting of poverty. The chapel of the Cambridge Friary was so small that a single carpenter was able in one day to set up the fifteen pairs of rafters which carried its roof. The infirmary at Oxford was barely of a man's height. Their holdings were kept at first within the narrowest possible limits ; Agnellus of Pisa would not allow any ground to be taken in, or any buildings to be set up, unless he was assured that they were absolutely essential. The site given for the use of the Friars at Gloucester seemed to him to be larger than was needed; he insisted that a part of it should be given back; in later years it was found to be absolutely necessary to the expansion of the community, and was recovered with some difficulty.

As Francis drew towards his end in Umbria, in pain of body, and in searchings of heart at the defection of some of his Brothers from the ideals which he had traced for them, his heart was doubtless cheered by reports of the faithfulness of the Brothers far away in England, among whom the old spirit of uttermost simplicity seemed to be renewed.

The coming of the Friars to England was a more

severe test of detachment and endurance than had yet been applied to the Order. The further north man lives, the greater are his physical needs, the more difficult is poverty. Winter brings bitter winds among the mountains of Umbria, in the *Little Flowers* there are not a few allusions to the cold which the first followers of Francis cheerfully endured. Yet the climate of England was less genial than any which the Pisan and the Florentine had yet known. They needed for mere existence shelter, and warmth, and more food than sufficed them in Italy. They were probably of gentle birth, as were most of the first Friars. They had been bred to scholarship, and though the student of the Middle Ages lived hard, he could secure the necessities, and some of the amenities, of life. But the Greyfriars made themselves in all respects as the poorest of those whom they came to serve. The first English Cistercians, eighty years before, had endured great privations, the chronicle of the first year at Fountains is perhaps typical of many of their foundations. Yet the towns of the thirteenth century entailed upon the very poor far harder conditions of life than were anywhere to be faced in the country-side. Noble and knight, merchant and burgess, could secure comfort in varying degrees. The poor were huddled together in hovels undrained and often subject to flood, continually swept by epidemics, which brought to them release from a life worse than death. Among them came the Greyfriars, welcome as heavenly minis-trants, settling on whatever poor site was offered to them. Their shelter was no better than the hovels which it neighboured; their habit was of the coarsest; they went barefoot in the stony lanes; they had nothing

that they might call their own. In them the poor saw the image of One Who had stooped to raise men up, and they were delivered from despair.

But it was not easy for the Greyfriars, even at first, to maintain undimmed their ideals of poverty. They continually warned themselves and one another against the insensible beginnings of indulgence, against mitigations of their custom. One told how a dead Brother had appeared to him in a dream, and said that if the Friars were not damned for their superfluous building, at least they would be gravely punished. Another had violated the custom that the Brethren should not go shod unless they were sick or weak; he had found a pair of shoes, and had put them on when he went to Mattins in the cold church. That night he dreamed that as he went by a dangerous pass between Oxford and Gloucester robbers leapt out upon him, crying 'Kill! Kill!' 'I am a Friar!' the Brother cried in terror. 'You lie!' was the reply, 'you go shod!' 'Not so!' said the Friar, lifting his foot in disproof. But the accusing shoe was upon it. He awoke in an agony of remorse, and threw the shoes out of the window. It was long before the Oxford Friars used mattresses; when they introduced pillows the stern Albert of Pisa told them that they needed no little mountains to raise their heads to heaven. Every beginning of indulgence was resisted, it could make its way only by slow degrees.

But their coming bettered the sanitary conditions of the poor among whom they lived. Swamps were drained, and the ways cleaned from filth. In many towns it was the Friars who first provided good water supplies, doubtless using to good purpose the experi-

ence of Italy. The conduits which they made for their friaries were placed at the service of the townsmen; Bristol and Grantham and Lincoln have been indebted for water until recent years to the provision made by the Greyfriars six centuries ago.

In those early days, and for long afterwards, the English Friars kept that spirit of cheerfulness which their Father Francis had exemplified. Silence was a great part of their life; on the greater vigils they sometimes passed the whole night in their oratories singing the divine office, and canticles and psalms. Hardship did not make the Greyfriars sad, it is said of the Oxford Friars that they even had to be restrained from too much mirth. They went whithersoever they were bidden by their superiors, even those who were of gentle birth journeyed without murmuring into the most desolate places. They trudged barefoot through mud and frost to hear lectures in distant schools of theology; and, profiting by their studies, themselves became in a short time preachers who were gladly heard both by the clergy and layfolk. They found everywhere postulants for the Order, and the numbers in the English houses were augmented by English students who had been to Paris, and others who had been in Italy, and had even seen there the Blessed Francis himself.

Matthew Paris, a stern censor of the declension of the Friars, bears witness to the fervour and devotion which marked their first appearance: 'They filled the land, dwelling in cities by tens and sevens, having literally no worldly goods of any kind, living of the Gospel. They ate the food and they wore the clothing which betokened extreme poverty; they went about

barefoot, showing to all men a pattern of the deepest humility. On Sundays and holy days they came forth from their lowly dwellings and offered their services as preachers of the Word of Life in the parish churches. They ate and drank whatever was set before them by those to whom they ministered. Deep was their insight into heavenly things, for their spiritual vision was unclouded by any attachment to earth, or any sympathy with its vain and fleeting pleasures. They made it a rule to keep nothing in the shape of food for the needs of the morrow, in order that the humility of spirit which ruled them might have an outward expression which could be recognized of all.'

We have already seen incidents in the progress of the struggle which began almost immediately between those who desired to keep the primitive simplicity, and those who saw that a definitely organized society had needs which must be met by mitigations of simplicity. The first sites and houses which were granted for their use proved in many cases to be insufficient, and were abandoned within a year or two for others more roomy, adequate to growing numbers. A Brother might reply, somewhat saucily, to his superior's command that he had not entered the Order to build walls, but walls were nevertheless necessary. Yet it might be a just criticism of a persuasive preacher that he had debased his mission by reiterating 'Give! Give!' Some saw in the activity of building a fault which would be visited with punishment; they were sure of it when Henry of Burford went to Paris, and built there a house great and high, which seemed to them an offence against poverty. So they besought the Blessed Francis that he would destroy it, and it actually fell,

by the divine mercy no one being in the building at the time. Thereupon the Friars quitted the site, and made a little couplet on the disaster, to the effect that divine grace taught them by the present ruin that man should be content with a less splendid home.

We see, in fact, in the English Province a departure from the simplicity of the Little Portion as Francis founded it, but we are not necessarily to judge that departure to be wholly censurable.

Abbot Cuthbert Butler, in his work on *Benedictine Monachism*, has spoken of 'the principle accepted in regard to all institutions, social, political, religious, that live on and work during long periods of time, that they needs must change and develop and grow, it may be almost out of recognition. It is a sign of life; for to live is to grow and to change, and such changes, however seemingly great, which are but the vital responses of a living organism to the conditions and needs of its successive environments, are justified as legitimate and true developments of the original idea. Hence to isolate S. Benedict's idea, or S. Francis' idea, and make it the sole measure of Benedictine or Franciscan history, ruling out whatever was not explicitly present to the Founder's consciousness, would be unhistorical, uncritical, and untrue.'

It is the main defect of M. Paul Sabatier's valuable contributions to Franciscan history that he regards all change in the Order as avoidable, and as degradation. In his view, that of an Alsatian Protestant pastor, the change was in part due to the unfaithfulness of Francis himself to his own ideal. M. Sabatier sees him as weak where he should have been strong, as yielding to others when he should have asserted his own will,

even though that assertion would have been contrary to the spirit of his action, contrary to his instinct of humility and self-effacement. M. Sabatier contends that the change was due even more to the subtle policy pursued by the Church, under the guise of a false friendship, that Church to which Francis paid the loyalty of a devoted son, to which he counselled prompt and unfaltering obedience. He conceives of the Church as gradually tightening its grip upon the Order, caring nothing for its real aim, but seeking to make of it yet one more useful agent for its own questionable policies. M. Sabatier's judgements commend themselves to few independent historians, his view is curiously superficial, and that for the reason that it ignores a truth set out in what has truly been termed one of the most illuminating pieces of theological writing in modern times.

In his work on *The Mystical Element in Religion* Baron Friedrich von Hügel shows that in religion there are three essential and complementary elements —the mystical, the intellectual, and the institutional. The wholeness and saneness of religion depends upon the balance and harmony of all three elements. If in an individual, or a religious movement, or a religious society, there is a loss of balance, the religion is defective, and may develop dangerous aberrations. A loss of balance is all that is possible, for von Hügel points out that each element is ever accompanied by some amount of the other two; religion can never be wholly mystical, or wholly intellectual, or wholly institutional, or it would cease to be religion.

In S. Francis himself the mystical element was predominant, the entire concentration upon God which

through the ways of penitence and illumination led to union with Him. Yet the other elements were also noticeably present. Though his education had been small, he was of acute mind. In many matters he provided for his Order with the greatest wisdom. Even when he seemed very simple, he was never the simpleton. His recorded sayings are often wise and shrewd, his actions were determined by the thoughtful following of one aim. None can say that from his religion the intellectual element was absent; even though he warned his followers against the cultivation of learning, and would have them possess few or no books, lest they should be tempted to forsake their mission.

Nor was the institutional element absent from the personal religion of S. Francis. He had the greatest reverence for the Church, as the Body of Christ in the world, the society in which grace and truth were ministered, for the priesthood, for the sacraments, for the whole apparatus of institutional religion. In nothing is the judgement of M. Sabatier more at variance with the evidence, in no point do the facts more obstinately refuse to be squared with his theories, than when he contends that Francis was really in opposition to the Church of his age, that he was the foe of institutionalism.

But if we recognize in Francis a balance of the three elements in religion which sufficed to him in his character of saint, and as an individual, we must also admit that in a Franciscan Order which at once increased to numbers far beyond expectation, and which therefore found itself confronted by problems at first unforeseen, the balance of the three elements needed some readjustment — found, indeed, an automatic

adjustment, as a condition of existence and of effective work. It was inevitable that the intellectual and the institutional elements should receive more emphasis, not as the result of a policy deliberately devised within the society, still less as the result of rapid deterioration, but in a response, at first almost insensible, to the pressure of external circumstances.

Even in Francis' lifetime the simple conception of the Franciscan family, in which were no definite subordinations, had to yield to a working scheme of discipline. By the year 1240 the whole Order was definitely organized. Each house had at its head a Guardian. The house together with its neighbours formed a group called a Custody, over which was a Custodian. There were in England seven Custodies, those of London, Oxford, Bristol, Cambridge, Worcester, York, and Newcastle. These Custodies formed the English Province, over which was the elected Provincial Minister, with his Provincial Chapter composed partly of Custodians and Guardians, and partly of elected representatives of the houses. The Provincial Minister had his seat in the Chapter-General of the whole Order, which had been substituted for the great Chapter of all the Friars, over which the Minister-General presided. The officers were constantly changed, unlike those of the monastic orders, in which a considerable length of tenure had become customary.

And as the Order rapidly grew, it was found impossible to keep the rule of poverty in all the primitive ways, though its spirit was followed. In the last year or two of his life Francis himself must have seen that the methods by which his ideal of poverty had originally been put into practice were incompatible with that

growth of the Order which he accepted as God's will for it. He had said that he did not desire that the Friars should be lodged together in large numbers, for it seemed to him a harder thing to observe poverty in a large multitude. But, as things came to be, it was clearly impossible to obey in its simplicity his precept that in founding a house they should make a trench and a hedge and build within the circuit poor houses of mud, and little cells wherein the Brethren might pray and work; and that they should have only little churches. They tried to follow his counsel; we have seen how the Friars in London at first kept it quite literally. And for years the divergence from the precept was not great. The first Franciscan churches were mere oratories, though by Papal indulgence of the year 1224, in which the Friars came to England, it was permitted to celebrate Mass in the oratories, provided that a portable altar-stone were used. This custom continued for a time the idea of absolute poverty, for so long as the oratories remained unconsecrated they were in no sense secured to the Friars, and might be turned into secular buildings. But twenty-five years later a Papal Bull confirmed the use which had already grown up of establishing the Friars' churches as conventual, and of having fixed and consecrated altars in them. Haymo of Feversham, when he was Provincial Minister in 1239, expressed his disapproval of this innovation of having regular altars and choirs, which was even then beginning to appear.

M. Sabatier has little difficulty in showing that the first precepts were not literally kept except in the earliest days; he makes no attempt to show us how they could have been kept as the Order grew, or to

suggest how S. Francis would have met the new problems which so insistently demanded solution.

The Greyfriars must have lodging, and lodging involved the occupation of land and houses. The prohibition of ownership was met by an expedient which was more than a legal fiction. Their dwellings, 'places' is the old term, were not held by them in freehold, or in fee-simple, but at the will of the benefactor whose property they remained. They were merely assigned to the Friars for their use, and the Friars were to hold themselves bound to go forth at any moment from property which they never considered as their own. The plan hardened, of course, into a mere convention in the course of time. A beneficiary naturally thinks of that which is held for him by trustees, and in which he is little likely to be disturbed, as in effect his own, even though he is unable to give or to sell it. If citizens built for the Friars a home suited to their rule, with a chapel for their worship and a house adapted to the purposes of their common life, it was natural that the Friars and their neighbours should soon come to regard it as practically their possession. And where a particular way of life has to be followed, buildings shape themselves to the needs of that life and of no other, since architecture is the most plastic and human of arts, so that conversion to secular uses seems quite improbable.

The English Greyfriars also, in spite of Albert of Pisa, soon came to think that holdings of a reasonable area were necessary to their life. They could point to the teaching of Francis, who had said that his Brethren should work with their hands, and should beg only when other means of livelihood failed them.

Though we speak of the Franciscans as a mendicant order, they were not intended by Francis to live only by mendicity, they were to labour before seeking alms. It is only in a very simple form of society that men vowed to religion can offer their labour, as in the early days at the Little Portion, without appearing to be in unfair competition with seculars in the market for labour. Therefore the definite assignment of land to their use seemed to be necessary. Within fifteen years of their landing in England the Provincial Minister Haymo of Feversham recognized this ; he said that he would rather that the Brethren should have more land and cultivate it, in order that they might have foodstuffs, than that they should beg them from others. When the friaries came to be dissolved there were found attached to almost all of them, even the houses of the austere Observants, gardens and orchards.

The Franciscans had never become farmers on the large scale, as had the Benedictines with their granges and the Cistercians with their flocks of sheep. They were content with what modest husbandry and gardening and orcharding sufficed their own needs, they seem to have produced little or nothing for sale. And doubtless they kept in mind that beautiful and entirely characteristic counsel of their Father Francis which is recorded in the *Mirror of Perfection* : ' He told the Brother that worked the garden not to dig the whole of the ground for eatable herbs only, but to leave some part of the ground for growing green herbs that in due time produce flowers for the Brothers, for the love of Him that is called the flower of the field and the lily of the valley. Yea, he said that Brother Gardener ought always to make a fair little garden in some part of the

garden land, setting and planting therein all manner of sweet-smelling herbs, and all herbs that do bring forth fair flowers, so that in their season they might invite those that did look upon the herbs and flowers to praise the Lord. For every creature doth cry out saying "God hath made me on account of thee, O man."'

It says much for the fidelity of the English Franciscans to the precept of Francis that they resisted from first to last the strong temptation to accept gifts of land for the purpose of rents by which they might maintain their work. In those days land was the one source of stable income. Every monastic order had added field to field, even those which had professed a strict poverty. But the Greyfriars never became landowners on any scale, either to farm themselves or to let to others. Their houses in England had at the Dissolution areas varying from one acre to forty-three, a most modest amount when the comparatively large number of Friars in each house is taken into consideration; and those houses which were most remote, and therefore least likely to win sufficient voluntary alms, held the most land. Cardinal Gasquet notes that at the Dissolution their real property was so unimportant that of two hundred convents of Friars, of the four orders, only some forty-five official deeds are known to exist, and of these more than a fourth were not enrolled. The only values for the spoiler were in the sites and buildings of the friaries. These had become valuable, by the growth of the towns around them, not valuable to the Friars while they possessed them, but valuable to those who obtained grants of the friaries.

In general, it may be said that they were resolute in their refusal of endowments, and in their dependence upon work and upon voluntary alms. If they departed from the first precept that they should not handle money, they did not depart very far. Some houses had small fixed rent-charges, but these were rare exceptions, forced upon them by donors who desired perpetual commemoration at the altars of Franciscan churches, or for the maintenance of divine service, and it was a difficult matter altogether to refuse these, when the intention was specific. Dr. Little gives an interesting example. Sir John Ughtred, about the year 1300, made the earliest endowment of Friars yet noted. He bestowed upon the Greyfriars of Scarborough a rent-charge on tenements 'to find two great wax candles burning daily at the elevation of the Host in the choir of the said Brethren, and to find oil in a lamp burning before the Host in the said choir, and bread and wine for celebration in the church and choir.' Having regard to the uncertainty of oblations for divine worship, it was a gift which could hardly be refused. Rents in other places were for chantry foundations.

Certain offerings came to them from such sure sources, and for so long a time, that they occupy an intermediate place between endowments and casual gifts. Of this kind were the annual payments from the Exchequer, granted by kings, and paid more or less regularly over long terms of years. But they were liable to discontinuance at any time, at the will of the King ; and some were, in fact, discontinued when the kings had great need of money for their wars. Annual grants of wood from the royal forests for building or for firing were common. Stated gifts in kind, of such

edibles as wheat and fish and loaves and meat, were regularly made by private persons or by towns. But the Friars were mainly dependent upon casual alms, in money or in kind. When these fluctuated, as at Oxford during the Long Vacation, the Friars went hungry. Bequests were made to them, but mainly of small sums, not for endowment but for maintenance ; as we should say, for their current account and not for their capital account.

It was desirable to stabilize in some degree the income from alms, and Friars were sent regularly on begging rounds. In the century before the Dissolution the begging Friars were in ill repute, as we shall see ; but at first they were willingly given what they needed. They collected by districts, and were thence named ' limitours.' It was an established method of the age, and not confined to the Friars. The Order of the Hospital of S. John of Jerusalem, though it had enormous possessions, regularly collected the alms of the faithful for their charitable and military needs in the East, retaining clerks for the purpose; and the *fraria* or *confraria*, as these alms were called, amounted to a very large annual sum.

Clothes, and cloth for the habits, were a common form of benefaction. Once, indeed, the Greyfriars sent back to the King a waggonload of cloth, because they had heard that he had taken it from the tailors without payment, and they would have none of such gifts. It was an act of charity performed by kings and rich men to feed the Friars for three days when they were assembled for their annual Provincial Chapter.

With the gradual rise in the standards of living among all classes the poverty of the Greyfriars became

relative rather than absolute. William of Nottingham had long ago prophesied that superfluities would insensibly increase in the Order, like the growth of hair in a man's beard. The development of the institutional element brought inevitable changes. Some were unavoidable, and founded in a real charity. S. Bonaventure was not tolerant of real laxity, yet when he was Minister-General thirty years after the death of Francis he pointed out that for the Friars to build houses of wood and thatch in a crowded town was a peril to their neighbours, increasing the risk of fire.

A development of intellectualism was also inevitable. Many had been the warnings of Francis against learning and books, against the curiosity of a knowledge which puffed up and was the occasion of falling. Yet the heresies which were rife in that age could only be combated by the exact setting forth of truth. The poor whom Francis would have his Brethren serve could best be served by scientific knowledge. So the Friars soon came to a degree of medical skill which was possessed by few in their age, and among them were surgeons in high repute, summoned even to the courts of kings. We realize to-day the value of medical missions, the Franciscans did so seven centuries ago. Again, if they were to go into foreign countries to convert the infidel, they must be able to speak their language, and schools of Arabic were founded.

It is to be noted that among the chief promoters of these studies, which Francis had deprecated, were such men as the devout Grossetête, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln, and Adam Marsh, to whose fineness of spirit his friendship with Grossetête sufficiently testifies. It

was Grossetête who directed the Oxford Franciscans, chief among them the renowned Roger Bacon, to the study of mathematics. It was he also who influenced them to study Greek and Hebrew, both in aid of their theological studies, and to help them in their labours in converting the many Jews in England. Franciscan commentaries and explanations of the sacred texts became of real value. The period of Franciscan activity in the universities was, in fact, a foreshadowing of the Renaissance. The phase of intense spiritual fervour, as Dr. Little says, was followed by a phase of intense intellectual activity. Meanwhile, the final organization of the Order had asserted the institutional element. The three necessary elements of religion had now received their expression. If intellectualism was found to be emphasized at the expense of the mystical element —and at first it was not so—it was because it had been too severely repressed at the Little Portion.

The intellectual service of the Order to the Church was all the more valuable because it was rendered at the moment when there was great need of it. Not only at Oxford but in the lesser houses it was as a new impulse. Canterbury was a lesser house ; in spite of its early foundation it never became prominent in the English Province, and was itself included in the Custody of London. But even while the Canterbury Greyfriars were still in their first humble lodging a lecturer was appointed, and books began to be collected for its library, one being bequeathed to them in 1253 by the holy bishop S. Richard of Chichester. Within fifty years the house had come to so great a repute for learning that it was able to provide a lecturer in theology for the great Benedictine Priory of Christ Church.

The former zeal of the Benedictines in learning had died away. Canterbury had not even provided the school of theology which, as a metropolitan church, it was bound to keep. When at last a school was established, for very shame, in 1275 it found its lecturer in the humble Franciscan friary; and Friars continued to lecture to the Canterbury Benedictines until 1314, when the Benedictines modestly confessed that they had been so well taught that they could now fill the office of lecturer from their own number.

At Oxford the Franciscans had the inestimable advantage of having Grossetête as their lecturer for ten years, until he was consecrated to the see of Lincoln, and the foremost scholar of his age left upon them an abiding influence. He devoted himself mainly to lecturing on the Holy Scriptures, paying less than the customary deference to the formal theology of the time. Friars came up from the houses to Oxford to pursue their theological studies, having already completed in their own houses their preliminary studies in Arts. Their friaries helped to maintain them at Oxford, they were assisted in some cases by patrons, and they shared in the alms given for poor students. Some were well born, the greater number were of the tradesman or artisan class. They took their degrees in divinity. When a Friar became at last a Doctor of Divinity he was accorded coveted privileges, he was allowed the use of a room to himself, with its desk and bookcase, a privilege which he must often have desired while making his studies in the distracting common life of the house. Now he could study at his ease; and there were many books at his disposal, for the English Greyfriars were from the first great accumulators of books.

Richard of Bury, who died Bishop of Durham after a life spent in the collecting of books, tells of the magnificence of the Friars' libraries that he had visited: 'There we found heaped up amidst the utmost poverty the utmost riches of wisdom.' Before the colleges which were founded so rapidly in the later Middle Ages diverted the stream of bequests, books were often left to the libraries of the Friars.

Learning was not pursued by the Greyfriars for its own sake, either at Oxford or elsewhere. Roger Bacon urged insistently that the end of all learning is the profit of the soul. The Greyfriars were to be learned in order that they might be serviceable to Christ's Church in the world; immediately by their own preaching and guidance of souls, mediately through the parochial clergy whom their writings instructed. From Oxford lectors went out in all directions to spread the knowledge which they had won. Nor did the English Province alone benefit by their scholarship; the Franciscan schools of the Continent drew teachers from Oxford, while Continental scholars took their place. The Oxford Franciscans quickened learning throughout the West of Europe.

But their very efficiency brought difficulties upon them. The monastic orders were jealous of these upstarts; some of the parochial clergy found it hard to tolerate these Friars who preached with such fervour, whose spiritual direction was so highly valued. Rome settled certain difficulties which arose; the Friars were given permission to preach in their own churches, and in parish churches by invitation of the parish priest or by command of the bishop; the bishops were to licence as confessors Friars presented to them as qualified.

They might bury in their churches those who had desired it, but they were to give to the parish priest a fourth part of all legacies and offerings. It was a wise working arrangement. Dr. Little notes that a large number of books on confession, penance, and direction were issued in the thirteenth century, and that the authors, so far as they can be identified, are mostly mendicant Friars. In this, as in other matters, they instructed and stimulated the parochial clergy. Their own preaching was effective. They knew well the minds, the sorrows, the temptations of those whom they addressed, for they lived among them and served them. They were never afraid to take the side of the oppressed, they rebuked the vices of all classes. Men who have little to lose are under small temptation to play the courtier.

The golden age of a religious community is usually the first century of its existence, or the century following its reform. There is for a generation the difficult struggle for existence, there follow the period of fervour and efficiency, the period of popularity and growing ease, the period of decline. A hundred years see the cycle completed. So it was with the English Greyfriars. They had not become wholly inefficient or lukewarm, but they were on the decline when the Great Pestilence, commonly called the Black Death, smote them, and all religious communities, so severely that they had not fully recovered when the Dissolution swept them away.

The Black Death left no class untouched, but it raged especially among the poor, and those who worked among the poor, the parish clergy and the Friars. Swiftly though the Black Death travelled, some Fran-

ciscan convents in Italy had already lost almost all their Friars before the pestilence reached England. It was computed at the Chapter-General at Lyons in 1351 that nearly fourteen thousand Franciscans had died. The effect upon the Friars was similar to that upon the monastic orders, and, to some extent, upon the secular clergy. Luke Wadding, the great historian of the Order, precisely defines this effect: 'This evil wrought great destruction to the holy houses of religion, carrying off the masters of regular discipline, and the seniors of experience. From this time the monastic orders, and the mendicant orders in particular, began to grow tepid and negligent, both in that piety and that learning in which they had up to this time flourished. Then, our illustrious members being carried off, the rigours of discipline, relaxed by these calamities, could not be renewed by the youths received without the necessary training, rather to fill the empty houses than to restore discipline.'

Although after the Black Death there was a lamentable decline in the spiritual and intellectual influence of the Order, it was saved from utter decadence by the rule of refusing endowments. Abuses were rife, but they were faults of the easy-going rather than of the immoral. Wyclif, whose criticism of the Greyfriars was all the more effective because he had framed for his own Poor Preachers the same simple way of life which the Friars had first followed, and who had hoped that the Friars would associate themselves with his movement, did not accuse the Friars of immorality. His followers were less scrupulous. The poetry of the age reflects a part, but not all, of the popular feeling. It was an age of intense hatreds and of passionate

invective, in which every weapon of vituperation was used. We cannot fully trust the portraiture of the mediaeval rhymer, whose lampoons often displayed the coarseness of his own mind rather than the true character of his victim. If all the people of England had seen the Friars as some painted them, they would have swept them away long before the general Dissolution of the religious houses. The truth is that there were strict and lax Friars, good and bad. In no Order was there a greater variety of type. Mysticism and irreverence, wisdom and folly, learning and ignorance—the grey habit covered all. It must be remembered also that to the end they evidently kept in a great degree the confidence and affection of the people. They and their houses were spared in popular riots, when prelates were murdered and priories despoiled. To the last a constant stream of small gifts and bequests flowed to the Friars. Men would not have continued to beseech their prayers if they had altogether despised their lives.

Certainly it is no pleasant picture that Chaucer gives of the begging Friar, the limitour, prying in the houses for meal and cheese and corn, demanding blanket and bacon and brawn, writing down the names of those for whom he would pray, and then erasing the names from the tablets as soon as he left the house, followed by a strong rascal carrying in a sack what things had been given him. Piers the Ploughman found that the Friars of all the four orders preached to the people and glossed the Gospel as they liked, construing it for profit. Another complained that there was no room for common folk in hell, because of the throng of Friars. But we may turn to other sources for other

judgements. The records of the later Oxford Friars show that there was still much solid learning there, though also much contention and disputation with the promoters of the new learning, both in its orthodox and its heretical forms. The Friar Brackley of the Paston Letters is a good man of business, a keen politician, not much more, but certainly not scandalous. It is also to be noted that the Friars Observant, a reform which had been established abroad long before it acquired a few houses in England, lived with the Conventuals, or unreformed Friars, in amity, sharing the same friary in Oxford.

It was upon the Observants that the storm broke first at the Dissolution. They had espoused the cause of Queen Catherine, stoutly maintaining that her marriage was good and lawful. They lectured the King to his face, warning him against his sin. Two hundred of them were thrown into prison, where at least a quarter of their number perished miserably. Others were afterwards martyred. A few, more fortunate than their fellows, made their way to safety abroad. The Conventuals had a few years' respite, they were not dissolved until 1538. They proved hardly worth the spoiling. Ingworth, Bishop of Dover, received the surrender of twelve houses of Friars in the Midlands, of which five were Franciscan. He reported to Thomas Crumwel that ' all were in poverty and little left, scarce to pay the debts, and in some places not so much as three pounds.' All that the King got out of them was the lead of the roofs, and twenty-four bells, and a chalice from each house. Other friaries elsewhere were equally poor.

So the Greyfriars passed from English life. Few

traces of their poor houses remain, hardly any that can be compared in extent or beauty with even the lesser ruins of monastic houses. In many places their only commemoration is in a few stones of an ancient wall, or in the name of a street. Yet their influence on England is felt to-day. At their coming the poor were slipping from the Church, and if the Church failed them none else could help. England made some response to the new impact of divine love manifest in the followers of Francis; perhaps it has never come nearer than at that moment to the experience of—

> One common wave of thought and joy
> Lifting mankind again.

It saw in the first Friars what love may mean for life, love instinct with that high courtesy which Francis had enjoined upon all who took his habit. Then for a time the Greyfriars had given England the gift of a splendid scholarship. If the first spirit was not maintained, at least we to-day can look back with gratitude and affection beyond the years of slackness to the coming of the little company of men who brought to England the message of Francis, the Little Poor Man who on the Umbrian hills had sung of the manifold love of God, and had seen the vision of the Crucified.

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